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PRIVATE EYE SUBSCRIPTIONS/SALES
PO Box 326, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8FA.
Subscription enquiries: 01795 414 871
Overseas: +44 (0) 1795 414 870 Fax: 01795 414 555.
Web: www.subsonline.co.uk
Email: private-eye@servicehelpline.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTION RATES
£28 per annum. Europe and Eire £34. Airmail (rest of world) £38.
Cheques/POs to Private Eye. Mastercard/Visa.

ADVERTISING
Ten Alps Publishing, 9 Savoy Street, London WC2E 7HR.
Email: private-eye@tenalpspublishing.com
Display: 020 7878 2366 **Classified:** 020 7240 9129

Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ.
Distributed by COMAG Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex, UB7 7QE. Tel 01895 433600.

ABC

Yes we pan!

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FIRST they said house prices could not fall here like they had in the United States; they did. Then they said there was no way repossessions here could rise to match the waves of foreclosures across the Atlantic; they're up 71 percent on last year. How long before our politicians catch up in their response to the crisis?

President-elect Barack Obama is proposing a 90-day moratorium on foreclosures for all banks accepting state aid, plus 10 percent tax relief on mortgages and new powers for judges to amend the mortgage payments of people facing bankruptcy.

Over here, meanwhile, the government is even struggling to convince the banks to go easy on homeowners and pass on cuts in interest rates, while the repossession rate at Northern Rock has doubled since it was nationalised. It's pushed forward a new pre-action protocol on mortgage arrears in a bid to make repossession "a last resort" – without actually changing the law to give it some force. And it's increased income support help – but not till next April.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

-42% Drop in Labour vote at Glasgow East by-election, which was apparently Gordon Brown's worst moment in June

-37% Drop in Labour vote at Glenrothes by-election, which was apparently Gordon Brown's finest moment last week

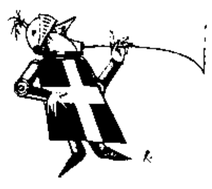
RUPERT Murdoch's son-in-law Matthew Freud arranged and paid for David Cameron to fly out to Greece by private jet over the summer for talks with the media magnate, at an estimated cost of £34,000. And, since Cameron wants the Digger's endorsement at the general election, he has been keen to show his gratitude.

It came in the form of a two-page article by Dave in the *Sun* last week, ostensibly about the Russell Brand affair, which turned into a wide-ranging attack on the "bloated BBC" – the high salaries, the "left-wing bias", the contempt for viewers. He sympathised with commercial competitors who feel "squeezed", though without mentioning that one of them happens to own the *Sun*. The solution, he suggested, might be to hand some of the BBC's licence fee cash back to viewers.

How uncanny that the Tory leader's article should chime so harmoniously with Murdoch's own views. Clever boy!

CORRECTION: In the last *Eye* we wrongly stated that David Cameron's new deregulation adviser, David Arculus, was the chairman of South West Water, which was subsequently fined £2m for lying to regulators. In fact Arculus chaired Severn Trent Water, which was convicted of the offence this year. Apologies to blameless South West Water, which was neither fined nor employed Arculus.

EYE TOLD YOU SO



SO. The few IT systems installed by BT and US software company Cerner in the London region under the doomed £13bn NHS National Programme for IT have been so disastrous that NHS London has "agreed to postpone the Go Live date of the care records service for all trusts".

Private Eye readers will not be remotely surprised to learn this; nor that all efforts are now focused on sorting out the mess and that the central element of the programme – acute hospital care records – has shuddered to a halt under ill-designed regional monopoly contracts which, as we first reported two and half years ago, don't work.

As extensively chronicled in the *Eye* by reporter Richard Brooks, joint winner of this year's Paul Foot Award for his exposé of the Actis saga, the one-size-fits-all, biggest-is-best approach to IT was never suited to the varied requirements of NHS hospitals. The Cerner system, for example, was designed for a US insurance-based health set-up.

The depth of the disaster is illustrated by an NHS paper titled "Lessons learnt from the Royal Free Hospital Emergency Department", listing 24 problems with the BT/Cerner system including "system crashes 2-3 times a week", which leads to "clinical risk as patients are 'lost'". Alarmingly for those concerned about security, "smart card log-in does not guarantee the owner of the card is the instigator of the action", causing "clinical governance issues" and making "tracing authors etc for complaints very difficult". Catching up with the story, London's *Evening Standard* reports that the fiasco has set the Royal Free back £7.2m.

Specialists preparing to implement the systems in other hospitals report that the Cerner software can't cope with the records that need to be transferred onto it such as previous diagnoses, the patient's GP and next of kin details. Most experts think it's time to call a day on the programme. A change of government might well see this happen but in the meantime, assisted by another lukewarm report from the National Audit Office declaring the scheme still "feasible", a few more hundreds of millions of public money can be poured down the plughole marked "NHS IT Programme".

The Laughing Policeman

Street Of Shame

"HOW gamble to bring back Lord Mandelson paid off," was the title of an OBN masterclass in the *Times* last week by political editor Philip Webster.

"Those who wondered whether Mr Brown would regret the move are now saying that Lord Mandelson has brought impressive qualities to the cabinet table and some of the younger members speak with awe of his first contribution: a comprehensive tour d'horizon, described variously as brilliant and stunning," he raved. "Lord Mandelson has become a dominant figure in Cabinet discussions… The atmosphere between them [Mandelson and Brown] appears to be amazingly warm."

This torrent of gush seems to have washed away all the awkward questions being asked by the *Times* and its stablemate the *Sunday Times* only a few days earlier about Mandy's relations with Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska, much to the delight of Rupert and James Murdoch. As the last *Eye* pointed out, they have good reason to keep Mandy onside: his Department of Business has a big say over vital issues in their business empire, such as the fate of BSkyB's shareholding in ITV. Sure enough, the Murdoch papers have quietly stopped badgering Mandy and started brown-nosing him instead.

AIDAN BARCLAY, London front man for the bizarrely secretive family that owns the *Daily Telegraph*, has been torn off a strip in the House of Lords.

Barclay repeatedly declined to appear before a Lords committee looking at media ownership; and the committee chairman, Lord Fowler, took spectacular revenge during a Lords debate.

Fowler told peers that although his committee had taken evidence from editors and proprietors (including the Dirty Digger and the *Mail*'s Lord Rothermere), "one proprietor – Mr Aidan Barclay, chairman of the *Telegraph* – did not come. I wrote four times and four times he declined, offering only a private, off-the-record interview in his office. This is now a matter for the procedure committee, which has said that it takes very seriously the committee's concerns and is discussing improvements in the system of calling witnesses."

Fowler went on to argue that Barclay was guilty of hypocrisy. The "essential claim" of newspapers, he said, was that "they have a right to ask questions and to expose the truth. "People who live by that claim cannot then turn round and say: 'But you cannot ask questions of me.' It is a defence which is simply not open to those who own or work for the media."

If Fowler gets his way, Barclay may soon be issued with an invitation he can't refuse.

ONE bit of bad news buried away on US election day was the tiny anonymous report on page 23 of the *Sun* that "The Red Arrows will perform at the 2012 London Olympics".

Bad news, that is, for *Sun* hack Virginia Wheeler, whose front-page story of September 2007 announced that the RAF formation team had been banned from the opening ceremony "because they are too BRITISH".

When members of the unofficial Olympics messageboard www.the2012londonolympics.com contacted her to question the veracity of her scoop, a confident Wheeler assured them in an email: "If they do indeed do a display at the Olympics I'll eat my computer."

ROSS HUMBUG

"SORRY if I'm missing something here, but can someone please explain to me why Jonathan Ross hasn't been fired yet by the BBC?" demanded Piers "Morgan" Moron in the *Daily Mail* on 29 October.

"As for that ginormous contract, I think you'll find that calling a 78-year-old man at home while on air and leaving a message on his answerphone telling him gleefully 'Russell Brand f***ed your granddaughter' comes under the category of gross misconduct, for which no settlement is necessary. Just a P45.

"If I'd done it, I'd be gone by now, and rightly so. So why isn't he?"

Curiously, when Moron committed his own bit of P45-earning misconduct in 2004 – printing fake photographs in the *Mirror* that he claimed showed British soldiers torturing Iraqi prisoners, and then refusing to apologise when they were proved to have been staged – he hired legal firm Schillings, the same lawyers favoured by one J Ross, to argue that a settlement was very necessary indeed. After three months of legal wrangling, he was awarded £1.7m by his former employer.

"NEVER again will Ross be allowed to get away with it. Nor, if he has any brains, will he try," mused Kelvin Mackenzie in the *Sun*. "Following the suspension, the BBC should make it clear they are not renewing his contract and either let Channel 4 or ITV have him… If Ross wants to stay at the BBC, why not write a cheque for £250,000 to Children In Need? That's a real apology."

In December 1988, the *Sun* was forced to pay Elton John record £1m damages after the then editor Mackenzie ran a series of completely false stories about him. In November 1989, he headlined a report "Straight Sex Cannot Give You Aids: Official". In April the same year he printed an equally fictitious account of the Hillsborough tragedy beneath the front-page headline "The Truth", for which he was forced to apologise publicly – although two years ago he announced that "I only did that because Rupert Murdoch told me to. I wasn't sorry then and I'm not sorry now."

Mackenzie's contract as editor of the *Sun* was renewed right up until 1994, when he left for another job within the same company. Details of his charitable donations are unknown.

"IN THE wake of the Brand and Ross storms the *News of the World* forced the BBC under the Freedom of Information Act to reveal that 50 Beeb execs earn MORE than the Prime Minister's £189,994," shrieked that paper in an outraged front-page scoop on 2 November.

"Director-general Mark Thompson's basic pay last year was £647,000 with benefits pushing it up to a whopping £816,000… Last night the corporation was slammed again by some of the biggest names in the broadcasting world for paying exorbitant salaries – far higher than those paid by their commercial rivals."

Really? One such commercial rival – though it has nothing like the reach, range of programming or audience of the BBC – is BSkyB, owned by Rupert Murdoch, proprietor of the *News of the World*. And how much does Thompson's equivalent there, chief executive officer Jeremy Darroch, get? In 2008 he was on a basic salary of £675,029 which, when bonus and benefits were taken into account, rose to a rather more whopping £1,908,411.

And Darroch comes cheap. His predecessor, whose surname just happened to be Murdoch (James), pulled in £1,045,000 in basic salary alone.

WHO cares if the Brand-Ross phone calls went out on the radio rather than the telly? Not the *Sunday Express*, which has reacted to the scandal by launching a "Clean Up TV Crusade". Its rallying cry is the headline that adorned a double-page spread last weekend: "Banish filth from our screens."

While a BBC spokesman made some sympathetic noises, the paper noted with disappointment that ITV was "less supportive" of its campaign for decency. Alas, there was no space for the opinions of another TV boss – Richard "Dirty" Desmond, whose Television X boasts "the broadest variety of filth, whether you are looking for fetish, lesbians, boy/girl, anal sex, amateur porn, first timers, big tits, small tits, Asian girls, blowjobs and celebrity sex".

TVX's programmes were listed, as usual, in the selfsame edition of the *Express* that launched the campaign against filth – though, again as usual, sub-editors had done their best to protect sensitive readers. Thus a programme listed in the *Express* TV guide as *The Porn Ghetto* is actually called *Fuck Ghetto*, *Abi's Party* is in fact *Abi's Pussy Party*, the proper title of *St Teeny* is *St Teenycum*. Until Dirty Des loses his own appetite for filth, there may be limits to how far the "Clean-Up TV Crusade" can go.

"IN THIS remarkably frank interview, Katherine Jenkins makes a courageous confession: her life was almost ruined by cocaine and ecstasy – and now she wants to warn others." When the Welsh singer made this shock admission to Piers Morgan (for it was he), the *Mail on Sunday* was keen to emphasise that it was Jenkins's guilt, and her concern for other young people exposed to the drugs scene, that prompted her to 'fess up.

Moron revealed that he had been sitting in a hotel bar in Dubai five days earlier when his phone rang: "Piers, it's Katherine Jenkins. I need to tell you something that's been bothering me." She explained that her drug days were "not something I ever wanted to talk about publicly because taking drugs is the biggest regret of my life. But I've always tried to be honest about my life."

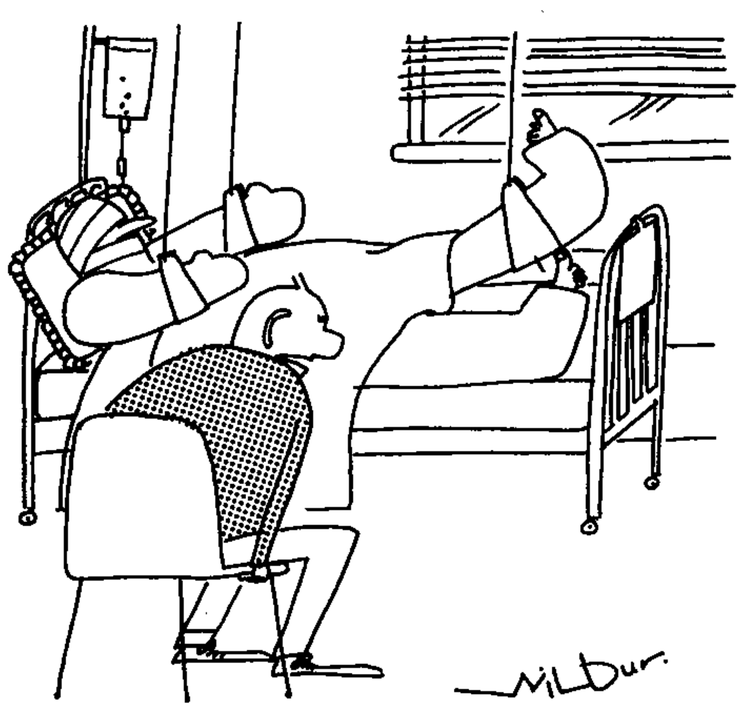
All very touching. But her rush to confess all might have had more to do with the knowledge that her ex-boyfriend, Steven Hart, had been hawking round Fleet Street all the grubby details of their time together. When Jenkins got wind of this, she called in libel bullies Schillings to warn editors not to touch Hart with a barge pole, allowing her enough time to launch her own pre-emptive damage limitation exercise with the ever accommodating Moron. There was, of course, no mention of these machinations in the "remarkably frank interview".

THE ZZZ-LIST

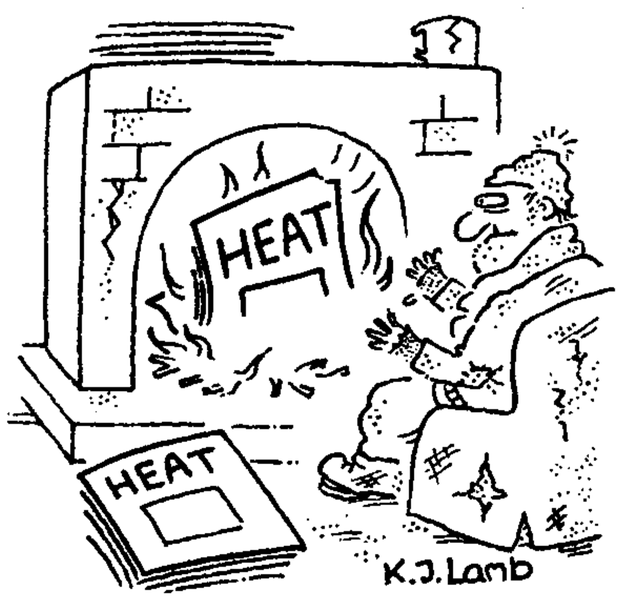
Truly pathetic non-stories about celebrities from the national press…

"Anne Hathaway's jailed ex-boyfriend tried to reconnect with the star by phoning her from prison – and reversing the charges. But she was not home to receive the call so the fraudster got her answering machine. Anne hasn't called back."

– Daily Star Sunday, 2 November



"Anyway, I'll let you get on..."



IT'S official – Christmas is cancelled at the *Daily* and *Sunday Express*. Chairman Richard "Dirty" Desmond, worried about a verbal or physical backlash from the swathes of journos he is throwing out into the snow as the global recession bites, has announced there will be no staff knees-up this year.

At previous Christmas parties Dirty Des has bored the balloons from the ceiling with speeches about circulation figures and ad revenue of each and every title in the Northern and Shell stable while his minions take rapturous advantage of the free booze on offer. But the thought of being drowned out by well-watered hacks bemoaning the loss of their jobs and pension rights has proved too big a worry for Des.

ONE Express Newspapers department likely to be bucking the redundancy trend is the legal section, where work is piling up faster than cash in the chairman's pension fund.

Following mega-payouts and apologies to the McCanns, Robert Murat and the Tapas Seven, the *Daily Star* carried an apology last week to actress Kelly Reilly for saying that she was "linked romantically" to gormless Guy Ritchie.

With the titles about to lose 86 of their sub-editors and hacks ordered to write straight into pages, many more apologies and payouts are inevitable. A glance at the legal department's in-tray reveals complaints from Matt Lucas, Kay Burley, Elle MacPherson, X-Factor's Leon Jackson, Kerry Katona's mother-in-law, the BBC and Whitney Houston.

The effects of the chairman's cost-cutting is confirmed by this recent desperate email to hacks on the *Express* and *Daily Star* from the company lawyer: "Importance: High. Does anybody have a copy of *All Balls and Glitter: My Life* by Craig Revel Horwood. It would help us with one of our complaints." M'learned friends and their clients are looking forward to a bumper Christmas.

1 CP F/T CAPE CAB	£4.99	£4.99
1 WHT SLCD TOASTIE	£1.33	£1.33
1 CP CLEMENTINES	£1.14	£1.14
1 PED SCHMACKOS	£1.35	£1.35
1 RASPBERRY JELLY	£0.52	£0.52
1 THE GURADIAN THU	£0.80	£0.80

Heatley Mere Co-op

"CYCLING just got cool," announces the *Daily Express*, as hackette Debbi Marco meets the couple behind the most stylish velocipede around, the Dutch "grandma bike" as it is known in its native country.

That will be the same Dutch bike that *Daily Express* editor Peter "Mentally" Hill was spotted riding around the underground car park of his City HQ just a few weeks ago. What a coincidence!

And here's another. On page 30 of the same edition readers are offered the chance to win a Toyota Prius (calls cost 75p per minute from a BT landline and last 2.5mins, while texts cost £2 and usual network rate). In a rare moment of generosity back in August, *Eye* readers will recall, Desmond equipped his team of sales reps with the brand new "mean but green" Prius. Are they by any chance related?

You bet. As Dirty Des introduces lay-offs throughout his empire, the reps' cars are being offered as prizes to the handful of readers the *Daily Express* has left.

"OBAMA changes the map of America in one night," declared *thelondonpaper* on 5 November.

But not as much as *thelondonpaper* had changed it – the paper's map of election results recorded that North and South Dakota voted for Obama. In fact, McCain took both states with an eight-point margin, both states having remained solidly Republican since the time of Lyndon B Johnson 44 years ago.

Yet another victory for facts in the age of the freebie newspaper!

HACKWATCH: YES WE CAN!

1 January 2007: Tim Hames of the *Times* dons the cape of Mystic Mogg and offers prophecies for the year ahead: Tony Blair is succeeded by Gordon Brown (fancy!) and "Senator Barack Obama decides not to run for the White House."

12 February: Obama has entered the race for the White House. Hames, who fancies himself as an expert on American politics, is livid. "He did so to the backdrop of a media swoon," he huffs. "Someone has to point out that this balloon has hype not helium inside it. I will do so. Mr Obama's claim to the White House is ridiculous… The American press craves the idea of a serious 'horse race' so much that it will award a lame mule with a fear of flying the status of Pegasus." Obama is "a risible figure": the Democrats might as well nominate Kermit the Frog, except that "Kermit has been on the scene for several decades, unlike Mr Obama". Digging himself in ever deeper, Hames vows that he'll eat the paper his words are printed on, with a dash of Tabasco sauce, if Obama wins. Hence the imperishable headline: "I've Got the Sauce to Say It: Barack Obama is a Loser."

6 September: "I'd like to make a few predictions about what might happen in this already extraordinary 2008 White House race," writes Toby Harnden, US editor of the *Daily Telegraph*. "Hillary Clinton will win the Democratic nomination, sweeping the primaries… Rudy Giuliani will win the Republican nomination… John McCain will pull out of the Republican race in October [2007]… In January 2009 President Hillary Clinton will be sworn in as commander-in-chief on the steps of the Capitol."

31 December: Heavyweight pundit Bruce Anderson gives his New Year ruminations in the *Independent*. "Mr Obama is a promising youngster," he admits. "But he is only a novice… In November, Mitt Romney will defeat Hillary Clinton for the Presidency." On the same day, *Times* readers have an oracular bulletin from the great Mogg himself. "Hillary Clinton should be ahead or level in Iowa," the doyen declares, "ahead in New Hampshire and should virtually win the nomination on Super Tuesday."

7 January 2008: Alarming prescience from Janet Daley of the *Telegraph*: "I will make some predictions about the presidential race. First, a relatively safe one: Barack Obama will become the Democratic nominee… John McCain will win the Republican nomination." Happily, she then lapses into Moggery: "For all the inspirational value of his candidacy, Obama will not win the presidency: America will have been made to feel sufficiently good about itself simply by his nomination and the way it responds to him as a candidate not to feel the need to put him in the White House."

14 January: William Rees-Mogg does some further entrail-reading for the benefit of *Mail on Sunday* readers. Although an Obama-McCain battle would be the most exciting since Kennedy-Nixon, "the actual contest is more likely to be Clinton-Huckabee".

16 March: "It is a fool's game to make predictions about this presidential race," says Matthew d'Ancona in the *Sunday Telegraph*. The fool duly rushes in, suggesting that John McCain would beat either Clinton or Obama. "McCain's numbers are looking good."

24 April: Time for the ancient wisdom of *Times* guru Anatole Kaletsky. "The Democrats must admit it: Obama would lose to McCain," he advises. "The 2008 US election has all the makings of a Greek tragedy, in which noble heroes and heroines are forced to follow a course to catastrophe, divinely preordained as punishment for sins and blunders committed by their forefathers in the dim and distant past. In acting out their ineluctable doom, the eloquent protagonists do not just destroy themselves but also their cities, their nations and even their entire civilisations." Shome hyperbole, surely? Not at all, Kaletsky insists: "If ever there was an election the Democrats ought to win this is the one. Yet on the basis of the primary results so far, they are all too likely to lose it."

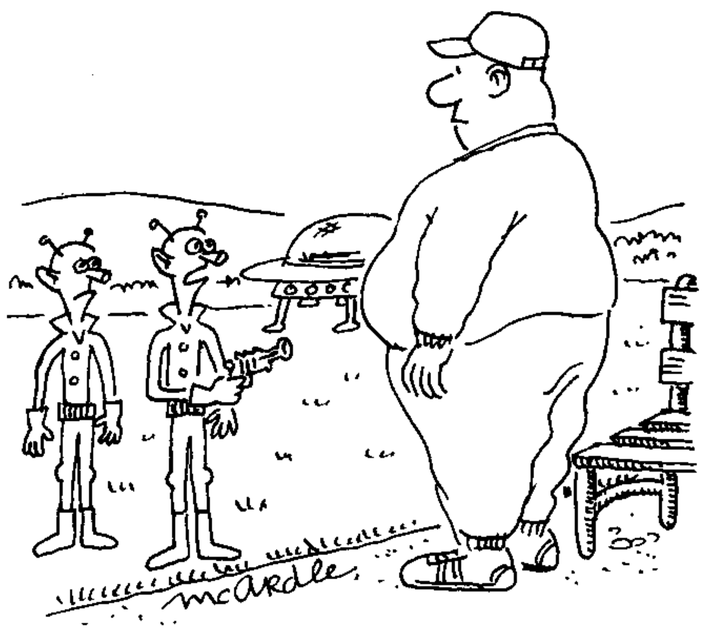
1 June: "Americans are conservative with a small 'c'," the BBC's American editor Justin Webb tells the *Observer*, "and I wonder when it comes to it whether they will pull back from the brink of something which would be a huge change." He has always said that McCain would win the presidency, and "I stand by that".

9 June: "Well, I got the first part right," gloats Janet Daley. "So now for the second half of my prediction: that John McCain would win the general election… I am standing by it. If anything, the events of the past few days have confirmed my view… Obama's support has peaked… His coalition of the young, the urban liberal and the black community has already max-ed out at its highest point and is going nowhere from there."

30 August: "How McCain can beat Obama," is the *Spectator*'s cover story, in which the "acclaimed young Republican writer" Reihan Salam delivers a cheerful verdict. "Despite the Obamania," the young genius reveals, "I believe that a McCain victory is looking more likely all the time."

30 September: "I think McCain will win," Simon Schama tells *Radio Times*. "The one thing everyone believed was that Obama had balls of steel. No one thought he would lie back while various forms of the Sarah Palin bull terrier snapped at his ankles or more important parts of his political anatomy… at this stage you don't win elections by giving philosophy lectures."

4 November: Election day, but one last voice must be heard. "There are few riskier journalistic enterprises than writing up the results of an election before the votes have been counted," writes Conrad Black, aka prisoner 18330-424, in a column for Canada's *National Post*. "Accordingly, I take that plunge. It is not as clear to me as it is to most people that Senator Obama has won…" They thought it was all over; it is now.



"Take us to your larder"

LUVADUCK, IT'S CARTER-FUCK!

BRITAIN's least avaricious solicitors, Messrs Carter-Fuck and partners, have been totting up the value of their honest toil in the recent libel action brought by their clients Tesco against the *Guardian*.

When the case was settled, two months ago, the newspaper agreed to pay modest damages (thought to be no more than £5,000) and "reasonable legal costs". As *Eye* readers will know, however, Carter-Fuck's idea of reasonable costs is like Imelda Marcos's idea of reasonable shoe-shopping. Although their clients received only a few grand and an apology, the lawyers hope to do rather better than that for themselves: last week they sent the *Guardian* a bill for more than £800,000.

Lest we forget, the libel action was launched in March but came to a juddering halt in July, when Mr Justice Eady ruled that the *Guardian* could cite the *Eye*'s revelations about Tesco tax-dodges in its defence; it then reached its inevitable terminus in September. How could even Carter-Fuck rack up such wallet-boggling fees in such a short time, in a case which never came to trial or anywhere near it – especially since all the costs of the preliminary hearing in July were awarded against Tesco, and are therefore omitted?

Well, senior partner Nigel Tait charges his time at £500 an hour, and so is owed £56,000 for "attendances on documents" (aka reading). Junior partner Magnus Boyd, whose current rate is £400 an hour, earned £90,000 in similar fashion. Even the office trainee managed to run up a bill of more than £20,000 at £160 an hour.

Then there are the barristers whom they had to consult. The advice of Adrienne Page QC was worth precisely £94,000.01 ("please make cheques payable to Miss Adrienne Page QC"); her junior, Justin Rushbrooke, was paid £64,500.

The 75-page bill itemises Carter-Fuck's labours in minute detail. On 22 April, for instance, Nigel Tait made £100 by "watching item on *Channel 4 News*". On 12 June he spent 12 minutes "reading/considering" an article in the *Eye*, which earned him another £100. In July he devoted six hours to "perusing all press coverage for allegations by *Guardian* that we are bullies": another £3,000 well spent.

Meanwhile, his colleague Magnus Boyd was "reviewing Felicity Lawrence's book *The Food on Your Plate* for references to Tesco", a task that somehow took four hours. On 12 May he spent three and a half hours on "follow-up research in the *Private Eye* article"; a month later he was "liaising throughout the day via email to review this week's *Private Eye*", bless him. One item in the £808,000 bill reads: "Purchase of *Guardian* newspaper, 80p." As Tesco would say, every little helps.

But big things help even more. Appended to the bill is a brief invoice from the accountants Ernst & Young: "Fee in respect of taxation services provided for Phase 1 of Project Reservoir: £87,500. Out of pocket disbursements – late night taxi fares: £108." And, er, that's it, with no indication of how this £87,500 was calculated or what "services" it bought.

Then there are two bills from the solicitors Berwin Leighton Paisner (BLP): one dated 30 April, claiming "fees – £180,000", the other from 30 September for "fees – £55,000". With VAT and other additions, Ernst & Young collected more than £100,000 while BLP trousered a modest £293,000. And for what? Though the invoices don't say so, these were the firms that helped Tesco set up its offshore scheme to avoid stamp duty land tax. After suing the *Guardian*, Tesco then re-hired them to explain all over again how its own tax-avoidance schemes work – something it could have found out by reading the *Eye*.

As we noted in *Eye* 1220, the apology which Tesco received in September was essentially what it could have had in May, when the *Guardian* made an "offer of amends", without running up bills for another four months. We suggested that the court assessor should bear this in mind when deciding whether the fees were reasonable, especially in view of Mr Justice Eady's scathing comments in July about the tactics of Carter-Fuck – "no doubt at great expense" – to try to keep the libel case going.

Now we know how great that expense is, it's hard to see how Carter-Fuck will justify it. A high court order issued at the time of the settlement stated that the *Guardian* would pay Tesco "reasonable legal costs of the libel claim (but not the malicious falsehood claim)" – a reference to the supermarket's barmy parallel action against editor Alan Rusbridger, which was halted by Eady. Yet the Carter-Fuck bill is liberally seasoned with items such as this, from 9 July: "Preparing for conference call and client by reviewing the elements of potential malice in the pre-publication stage in the correspondence and trying to establish the basis for the malice against Alan Rusbridger." That alone earned Magnus Boyd over £1,000. By now asking the *Guardian* to pay for their work on the malicious falsehood case, Carter-Fuck are not only pulling a fast one: they're breaching an order of the high court. If they want to know the consequences of this, perhaps they should consult a lawyer.

FINANCIAL SPECIAL

WHILE the US has its ferocious senate finance committee, the best hope Britain has for learning any lessons from the financial crisis lies with the Commons treasury select committee (TSC).

The TSC should already have held Gordon Brown to account on the looming economic problems that were obvious to many critics. But under its arch-Brownite chairman since 2001, John McFall, it has instead given him kid-glove treatment.

McFall was suitably fawning again last weekend, telling Radio 4's *Week in Westminster* that the crisis showed "just how much of a leader Gordon Brown is in that area" and lauding his "character, strength and intellect". Best look elsewhere then for a decent postmortem on the death of Gordonomics…

BARACK OBAMA'S promise to clamp down on tax havens when he takes control in January must have caused a flutter or two of anguish in the offices of Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling.

The UK government has hardly been consistent in its approach to tax havens. It has spent 11 years encouraging them – not least by, ahem, selling Britain's tax offices to a company based in one – but when faced with arguments that he should compensate savers using accounts in the Isle of Man, Darling dismissed the island as a "tax haven sitting in the Irish Sea".

The thousands who lost out when Darling scuppered the Isle of Man operations of Icelandic bank Kaupthing Singer Friedlander last month by freezing UK assets that included deposits forwarded from the island doubtless include plenty of tax-dodgers. But innocents were caught up, too, often expats who couldn't open British accounts without British addresses. They fell back on the financial services of the offshore islands that the British government has long promoted.

So keen was the government to cooperate with the Isle of Man that on 29 September, just a fortnight before the big freeze and the busting of Kaupthing Isle of Man, it had signed a tax agreement with the Manx government. Darling's Treasury colleague, financial secretary Jane Kennedy, welcomed the island's "willingness to implement these high standards of transparency and exchange of information and acknowledge their commitment".

Darling also promised a "long hard look" at Britain's relationship with the Isle of Man. As with financial regulation generally, don't expect this to include an admission that he and Gordon have screwed it up for years.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

PUPILS at a new academy school in Southampton celebrated its opening by smashing windows in a "rampage" as their protest against the new school management got out of hand. The opening has been such a success that nearly a quarter of staff are leaving at the end of the first term and one minister has described the academy sponsor, Oasis Learning, as "very inexperienced".

Oasis, a religious charity, took over and merged two Southampton secondary schools earlier this year. Neither was failing, with Ofsted inspections describing them as "satisfactory" and "improving". Oasis then made a series of schoolboy errors at their new Mayfield Academy, leading to a crisis in performance, discipline and morale.

Many staff were allowed to leave or even encouraged to, at considerable cost in pension deals. Meanwhile remaining teachers and supply staff are not getting to class on time because Oasis is shuttling them between the two school sites on a minibus.

"Inspirational" baptist minister Steve Chalke, author of books such as *Change Agents: 25 Hard-Learned Lessons in the Art of Getting Things Done*, runs Oasis. Unfortunately, Chalke is having great difficulty making the minibus run on time. Demoralised teachers arriving late led to a loss of authority, which reached a peak at the end of last month when the protest by students got out of control and windows were smashed.

Witnesses suggested that more than 100 year 10 and 11 pupils were involved in the "rampage", but Oasis insists that "no more than 40" pupils took part in the lunchtime action. Ofsted says it will send inspectors to the new school.

Southampton Itchen MP John Denham, who also happens to be an education minister, called Oasis "a very inexperienced organisation" in need of "more expertise" from education experts after complaints from parents in his constituency. But schools minister Ed Balls is still keen to hand over a dozen academy schools to the organisation. Not only that but, as Chalke has boasted,"Oasis is regularly consulted at the highest level by government departments as an expert source on issues of education and social policy". Indeed, ministers seem so excited about offloading services to religious charities they have even discussed asking Oasis to run hospital and prison services.

"I am 1.5% less suicidal"

WHO better to chair the new body looking after the taxpayers' £37bn investment in Britain's banks, UK Financial Investments Ltd, (UKFI) than ex-banker Sir Philip Hampton?

Announcing Hampton's appointment, the treasury highlighted his 2004 review of regulatory inspection and enforcement "which informed the subsequent Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008". Sounds like just the guy to keep those banks on the rails.

Except Hampton's review was all about *de*-regulation. He recommended that regulators should worry about the business success of the companies they regulated, not just their standards, while a key plank of the RES Act was "a power to require regulators not to impose or maintain unnecessary regulatory burdens on businesses".

UKFI will "support management incentivisation based on long term value maximization", which again makes Hampton an odd choice. As finance director of British Gas in the 1990s he presided, in the words of a Scottish judge, over "sharp cuts in staff and other cost saving exercises" while "billions were being spent on reorganizing the company". The result was the neglect of pipeline safety that led to the death of a family of four in a 1999 explosion, for which the company was fined a record £15m (see *Eye* 1141).

Hampton will be joined by mandarin John Kingman as chief executive. Kingman previously ran the treasury directorate responsible for financial regulation. So keen was it on regulation that it changed its name from "finance, regulation and industry" to "finance and industry".

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

LAST WEEK the European commission held a small celebration marking the 120th anniversary of the birth of Jean Monnet, one of the EU's founding fathers. Though Monnet is deified in Brussels, few in the English-speaking world realize quite how well qualified he was to set the EU gravy train in motion.

Monnet, who now rests in the Panthéon in Paris, lived for a long time in a house at Houjarray, Versailles, now a museum dedicated to his memory. He bought the house shortly after France's liberation in 1944; and did so from a Swedish politician whose grandson, Peter Bratt, now happens to be a leading journalist in Sweden. The latter's autobiography sheds interesting light on the great European visionary.

When Monnet bought the house the price was negotiated in US dollars, but on the day of the deal Monnet insisted on paying in French francs. By an extraordinary coincidence, the very next day the franc was devalued, meaning that Monnet effectively got the house for one hundredth of the agreed price. By another extraordinary coincidence, Monnet was at the time a member of the French Committee for National Liberation, which, er, oversaw the devaluation.

As Peter Bratt writes, the great man "conned" his grandfather. No wonder Brussels has no plans to change its description of Monnet as the "main inspiration" behind the European project!

HIGHER education minister David Lammy has called for more effort to be made to encourage British students to study abroad. But those trying to do so in Europe are struggling to make ends meet thanks to the British Council's failure, for the second year running, to send grant money from the EU's Erasmus programme on time.

Erasmus grants are specifically aimed at helping students study abroad; and the British Council won the contract to process them for British students two years ago, netting it £5m over seven years.

Last year, however, both instalments of the Erasmus grants were paid more than a month late. *London Student* newspaper reported students stranded abroad without the money to get home.

EU-phemisms

THERE ARE INDICATIONS OF A POSSIBILITY THAT THE NEXT QUARTER MAY SEE A POTENTIAL REDUCTION IN GROWTH
EUROZONE ECONOMIC REPORT
RGJ.

We're definitely in recession

HOW BANKING WORKS

BARCLAYS hasn't missed a trick in raising capital from Abu Dhabi and Qatar to shore up its balance sheet following credit crunch losses caused largely by convoluted offshore debt structures.

The bank has ensured that its new deal attracts tax relief, making it cheaper than terms on offer from the government, by the deft use of… a convoluted offshore debt structure!

Dividends on core capital wouldn't normally be tax deductible. Or at least they weren't until Gordon Brown's Financial Services Authority and the Inland Revenue caved in to the banks in 1998 to allow them to issue "innovative tier 1 capital", on which payments would be tax-deductible, as well as boring old shares. Innovation was, after all, more important to regulators and tax authorities than regulation and tax raising.

This "innovation", pulling off the twin trick of tax-deductibility and top regulatory capital status, only works by borrowing money from offshore vehicles which themselves have been funded by the ultimate investors. Thus Sheikh Mansour of Abu Dhabi's money comes through a Jersey company, PCP Gulf Invest 2 Ltd. And a chunk of Sheik al Thani of Qatar's interests are held through his British Virgin Islands company, Challenger Universal Ltd.

The upshot will be a tax deduction for the 14 percent Barclays pays on £3bn "reserve capital instruments". In plain English this means Barclays will generate a £120m annual saving on its tax bill and kick a corresponding dent in an already skint exchequer. Another triumph for Brown's banking Britain campaign!

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£2.3m Funding withdrawn by Home Office, as a result of which the Met Police's human trafficking team will have to disband

£5.7m Staff bonuses paid out by Home Office in last financial year

POKE IN THE EYE

THE normally supine House of Lords privileges committee, whose job is to oversee the behaviour of peers, has finally issued some stinging criticism following a complaint against a peer. Unfortunately the criticism is of *Private Eye*, the complainant (for it was us), and not the peer, whose conduct got the usual whitewash.

Earlier this year the *Eye* reported how former health minister Lord (Norman) Warner spoke in debates on health without declaring interests in half a dozen companies profiting from the privatisation of health services (1204 and 1219). In the queen's speech debate on 8 November 2007, for example, he argued that "choice and competition with a mixed economy of providers… are critical to success". By that stage he had already been cleared to take up the private health jobs and started the first one the same month. (This didn't stop him memorably dismissing doctors' opposition to government policy as having "the whiff of self-interest").

This year Warner spoke in six debates during the committee stage of the health and social care bill, which has a direct bearing on his employers – again without declaring his interests, even though he had declared them in the March "2nd reading" debate that preceded the committee stage.

On each occasion the *Eye* put the failures to the privileges committee, pointing out that the peers' code of conduct requires them to "declare when speaking in the House… any interest which is a relevant interest in the context of the debate or the matter under discussion" – an unambiguous order, you might have thought, for a peer to own up when he or she stands up.

After dismissing the first complaint without explanation, the second one prompted the committee, chaired by hereditary peer Lord Brabazon, to explain why it was dismissing both. On the first it concluded that, since the code doesn't cover what Warner considered *future* interests, non-declaration had been "reasonable". Case dismissed – though many might think an accepted offer of employment is a *present* interest and that if you're within days of working for a company making serious moolah in the area under debate the honourable thing would be to say so.

On the second complaint the committee reported: "Lord Warner took the view that having declared his interests during the 2nd reading debate, in the context of the bill as a whole, he was not required to take up the House's time by repeating such declarations in the context of debates on narrower amendments at later stages of the bill. Again, we believe that his interpretation of the code was reasonable."

So, in a new debate weeks after the initial declaration and in front of a different audience, how much precious time would a declaration have taken up? The *Eye's* man with the stopwatch put it at five seconds.

Having tortuously let Warner off on a couple of technicalities, the committee did concede that in future the code will make clear that "future" interests count and all interests must be declared at the start of each parliamentary stage of a bill.

But the sting was reserved for the *Eye* hack who "used the complaints to further what can only be described as a campaign against Lord Warner" and "showed scant respect for procedural fairness or parliamentary privilege".

VFS NBG

VFS GLOBAL, the private company sacked by the foreign office last year after a serious security breach on the UK visas website, is still putting travellers' documents at risk, the *Eye* has learnt.

VFS administers visa applications for various diplomatic missions around the world, and in an outsourcing deal this summer took over the running of the visa section of the Indian high commission in the UK. This sparked immediate complaints as the price of visas for British travellers rose and applicants found they could not get through to anyone with queries. VFS apologised for its call centre problems in July and promised to improve.

More worryingly, however, the company is still up to its old tricks with document security – as *Eye* reader Steve Fox discovered when his daughter applied last month for a visa by post. VFS wrote back, saying she had not enclosed a self-addressed envelope. Along with the letter, it enclosed not only the self-addressed envelope she had sent but two other people's passports and application documents!

FIVE TV

US Election Night (BBC1)

Election Night Live: America Decides (ITV1)

Decision Time USA (Sky News)

FOR British political hacks, the US election has always been a quadrennial super-jolly, their equivalent of the Olympics for the sports jocks.

Viewers in the UK have often wondered if it was really necessary for quite so many of them to be eating stacks of blueberry pancakes in Washington cafes, but there were unlikely to be any complaints this time round: here was a truly epoch-making poll in which the frontrunner was a hip young guy who might even get the 15-24s tuning in.

Sadly, though, the 2008 coverage from the British networks looked more self-indulgent and unnecessary than ever. For a start, digital and web options mean that the tiny number of political obsessives who stay up through the night here now have direct access to the American network coverage. By the time David Dimbleby on BBC1 or Alistair Stewart on ITV1 excitedly revealed that Fox or CNN or NBC was "calling Ohio for Obama", savvy British viewers were already able to have seen them calling it. Apart from the sections in which the stateside shows briefly concentrate on congressional races, there would now be a strong case, editorially as well as financially, for British networks taking a feed from their American counterparts, with occasional glossing from our lot.

An additional problem this time was that our lot looked pretty shabby. Both BBC and ITV had cast their lead teams more from the McCain than the Obama generations and Dimbleby and Stewart seemed visibly to be fighting jet-lag and tiredness as the night wore on. Both became involved in testy exchanges with American panelists who believed they were being patronised by some old limey. Over on Sky, main anchor Jeremy Thompson looked less in need of Sanatogen but had the disadvantage of being in New York when the stories were in Washington and Chicago.

The hideous whiteness of Britain's on-screen teams was also a problem, with the coverage of a young black president coming almost exclusively from old white guys, with the occasional younger white man or woman thrown in. And the repeated rhetoric from Washington about a generational shift seemed to be causing some tension between them. It was not too historic a night for Paxo to refrain from reprising some old office politics, bitch-slapping Jeremy Vine, who has now taken over the Snow patrol on the statistics, with the languid handover: "Here's Jeremy Vine, with his latest toy."

Although tabloid front pages were screaming that the Beeb had flown jumbo-loads of staff over, the corporation had actually made an economy by keeping Vine in London with his virtual battleground, a huge touch-sensitive screen. Unfortunately, it was like watching, on a gigantically magnified scale, your mate's realisation that the iPhone doesn't live up the hype.

Junior Jezza's brushing of the screen either brought up nothing at all or data we didn't need, like the teenage pregnancy rates in Hiramsucker County, Idaho. Even worse, Dimbleby in DC never seemed to have any idea what Vine had just said.

All British television's most unfortunate tendencies were in evidence. For example, the belief that no format is now valid without the presence of a well-known comedian. ITV1 had Jon Culshaw as part of its studio team, although his attempt to impersonate Obama might have been less squirm-making on radio. The BBC wheeled out Ricky Gervais in its New York studio. Despite having done a national stand-up tour and DVD release called Politics, Gervais admitted that he never followed British elections but had got really interested in the 2008 American race while filming in the country. "Who would David Brent vote for?" asked his BBC hostess, with a witlessness to which even Brent wouldn't sink. Unsure whether to be satirical or sincere, Gervais went for the latter, giving the classic luvvie answer of Obama.

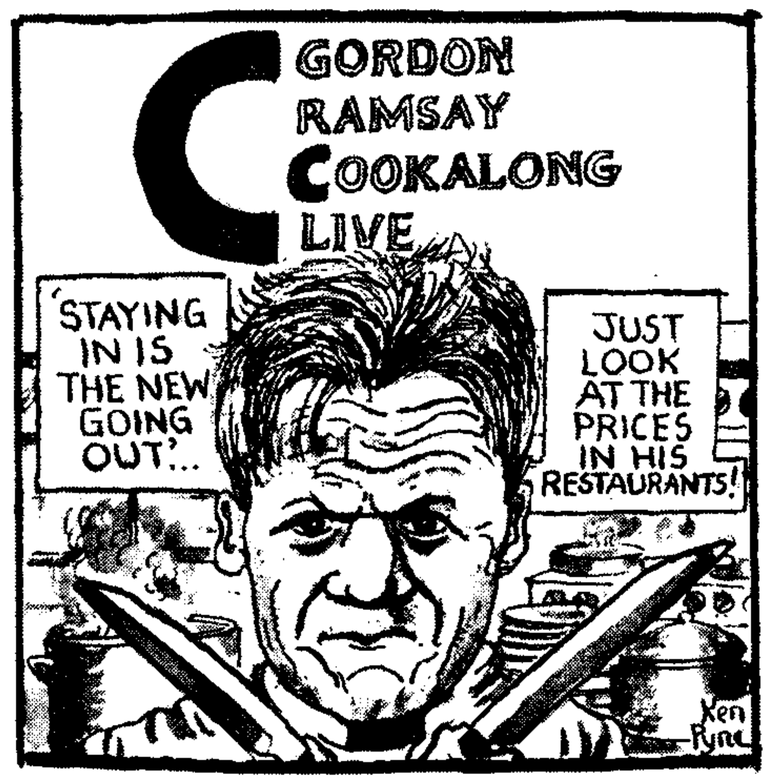
An even bigger blight than on-screen comedians was off-screen guidelines. This column recently complained that the BBC's obsession with balanced reporting had made much of its coverage of the financial crash and Labour Party Conference meaningless: these were stories in which there are not simple pro or anti soundbites.

And, with the American election, the extreme caution of the reporting again proved a disservice to the viewer. Dimbleby kept treating the absence of projected results from the American networks as an embarrassment or irritation, never appreciating, despite the attempts of some of his panel to explain, that the slowness was itself a story. If historic Republican strongholds such as Virginia and Indiana, usually given to the Republicans as soon as polls close, were too tight to call, then Obama was the most competitive Democratic candidate in modern times and his victory was more or less apparent from midnight British time. But Dimbles kept grumping that they didn't have any results.

Even worse, the obsession with balance meant that, even after McCain failed to take Pennsylvania, on which his only plausible electoral strategy depended, reporters with the Arizona senator's campaign were still interviewing McCain aides who, with bright denial, insisted they had reports that other battleground states were tightening. It's true that the Florida 2000 debacle made television look silly but now post-Florida precautions are the cause of them seeming even more stupid.

"It's done!" declared Chris Hitchens in the BBC studio at 1.05am British DST, as Ohio went to Obama. But he was carefully ignored and the whole thing went on for another five hours, including cautiously upbeat reports from Camp McCain. It's a good bet that the Republican party will not be the only venerable institution in which the devastating experience of *Election Night 2008* will lead to a generational transition.

'Remote Controller'



AD NAUSEAM

THE revival of Cadbury's Wispa bar has been a triumph of snowballing PR hokum. It began with a supposedly spontaneous public campaign to bring back the Wispa (initiated, of course, by Cadbury's PR agency Borkowski via Facebook) and was then swallowed whole and regurgitated by allegedly serious newspapers like the *Guardian*.

Now that this micro-managed public clamour has been followed by the Wispa's relaunch – as planned all along – the bar has become Cadbury's fastest selling product of the last four years, proving that you can indeed fool all of the people all of the time.

But Wispa's forthcoming ad campaign is surely pushing the public's willingness to be laughed at by marketing men too far. News posters and bus-sides are asking for a series of bizarre items to be donated for an advertising campaign. Go to Wispa's website and it turns out that Cadbury's agency, Fallon, wants everything from airfields to estates to aeroplanes to blimps to helicopters to marching bands. Imagine the crazy cavalcade that will ensue! Have a look at the smallprint, however, and it turns out that "no fees or expenses whatsoever will be payable" for donating your estate or aeroplane, and that "the product may not be returned to you at the end of the campaign." In other words, Fallon saves a fortune on locations and props, while grabbing a headline or two in the bargain. Will it be pledging its own services for free, we wonder, in accordance with its slogan, "For the Love of Wispa"? Don't bet on it.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC1

Anne Robinson: What "O" is a tea named after the Chinese word for dragon?

Contestant: Ovaltine.

AR: In the Carry On films, the actor who played characters named Pint Pot, Sir Roger de Lodgerley and Private Widdle was Charles who?

Contestant: Windsor.

Smooth Radio

Mark Goodier: Can you name David Bowie's wife?

Caller: Is it Imran Khan?

Mastermind, BBC2

John Humphrys: In September 1783, a sheep, a rooster and a duck were the first passengers ever to travel on which form of transport?

Contestant: A hovercraft.

10.35 Russell Brand's Ponderland

RT CHOICE **COMEDY OF THE WEEK**

2/5. Tonight the comedian offers his own unique take on the theme of family, meeting a 12-year-old who is in control of his entire clan.

Director Toby Baker; Exec producer John Linnen (S) **214964**

11.10 Fonejacker

New series 1/6; series two. Kayvan Novak creates more confusion as a man in various guises who is addicted to making prank telephone calls.

Radio Times

RADIO DAZE

THE resignation of Lesley Douglas from the BBC over the Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross affair was greeted with dismay by her colleagues – and must also have come as a blow to John Noel, a talent agent with more reason than most to tune in to the stations she controlled, Radio 2 and 6 Music.

Noel is best known as Brand's agent – the fop-jock credits him with weaning him off crack and heroin and launching his stellar career a few years back. But he also represents Dermot O'Leary, whom Douglas recruited to helm three hours on Radio 2 on Saturday afternoons, and Matthew Wright, who until July had a regular Friday-night slot (inherited from fellow Noel client Mariella Frostrup in 2006). Noel also represents Davina McCall, who, despite flopping spectacularly as a chat-show host on BBC1 in 2006, was awarded a spell filling in for Ken Bruce on his 6m-listener mid-morning show the following summer. Result: more than 150 complaints and no invitation to return.

Over on 6 Music, Noel's influence is even more apparent: he represents the trio of weekday daytime presenters Sean Keaveny, George Lamb and Nemone, who between them are responsible for 45 hours of output each week, as well as weekend DJs the Queens of Noize. Now that the presenter to whom colleagues believed Douglas's commitment was "almost obsessive" is gone, will his fellow Noel clients have the same appeal to her successor?

John Noel is also the company secretary of Vanity Projects, Brand's own production company, which, five months prior to his resignation, took over responsibility for his Radio 2 show from the BBC after the Douglas-approved removal of a number of in-house producers with whom Brand had clashed. Vanity is also responsible for Brand's programmes for Channel 4, its only non-Brand-related output being four short films by Karl Pilkington. His agent? John Noel.

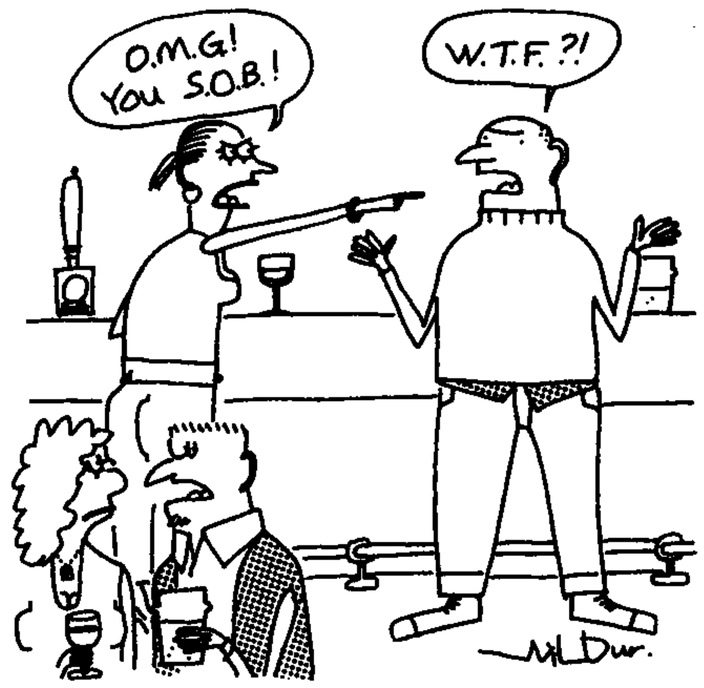
This arm's-length relationship – whereby responsibility for reining in and censoring on-air talent fell upon staff directly employed by that talent – has been cited by many as a factor in the Brand catastrophe. Those with memories long enough to pre-date Brand's purported youth appeal might remember the equally notorious departure of Chris Evans from the Radio 1 breakfast show in January 1997. That was blamed on a series of on-air excesses arising directly from the then-unprecedented deal to allow his own company, Ginger Productions, to produce the programme.

If memories at Radio 2 do not stretch back that far, perhaps they might recall a ruling by Ofcom in July 2007 that the broadcasting of the phrase "fuck off" during a pre-recorded Saturday-lunchtime show, *The Green Guide to Life*, "exposed a weakness in the broadcaster's compliance procedures" which required action: "Further, this is not the first occasion on which inappropriate language has been transmitted on Radio 2. Ofcom therefore considers it appropriate to record a breach of the code."

In its submission to the watchdog, the BBC blamed the mistake on the production company that made the show, Open Mike (owned by Addison Cresswell, agent of both Jeff Green and Jonathan Ross), and claimed to have "instituted new compliance procedures to ensure that all programmes are reviewed in-house to ensure compliance".

The BBC has, meanwhile, announced that it will be compensating Hot Sauce, the production company that makes Ross's Radio 2 programme and his BBC1 chat show, for "all relevant production costs" during the three months the programmes will be off the air due to his suspension. The owner of Hot Sauce? One Jonathan Ross.

That the company should take over production of his BBC output was one of the more overlooked aspects of the 2006 contract – negotiated by Cresswell – which resulted in Ross's £18m package.



"Oh dear, it's getting very acronymious"

Obamaballs

"Police are urging fans travelling by rail to football matches this Saturday to emulate the Americans and turn a page in history. 'The election of Barack Obama to the White House has turned a page in world history – now's the time for football fans to do the same,' said Superintendent Colum Price from British Transport Police. 'His election has brought with it a new sense of optimism, and we are also optimistic that the trend of increasing problems associated with some travelling fans can be reversed.'"

– Press release, British Transport Police

"Calzaghe silenced New York. By the close an American audience, drunk on the motif of the moment, 'Yes we can', understood that Barack Obama's winning words had no application for their man, a boxer whose time had long since passed."

– Kevin Garside on Joe Calzaghe's victory,
Daily Telegraph

"Selfridges is already seeing 'the Obama effect' with Britain's men keen to make the right impression at work, buying into his signature style simplicity…"

– Press release from Selfridges' Menswear department

"Upon news of Barack Obama's presidential victory, Grammy-winning hiphop artist, actor, and children's book author Common decided to leak the song *Changes* early off his upcoming album *Universal Mind Control*, which is set for release on 9 December 2008."

– Press release, thinkcommon.com

"The Opposition in this country have an advantage, like the Democrats in America, in that we are the principal vehicle for change, and the liveliest, most engaged and passionate voices on the internet are arrayed, broadly, on our side against the establishment."

– Tory schools spokesman Michael Gove,
Daily Telegraph

MEDIA NEWS

NO WONDER the opening of the new Westfield shopping centre in Shepherd's Bush, west London, got saturation coverage on air and online from the BBC in recent weeks.

One group of shoppers who will find it easier to watch the pennies at the new cathedral of consumerism are… BBC employees, all of whom benefit from a discount of 10 percent or more in over 50 shops "on production of a BBC identity pass".

MORALE at the rolling BBC News channel continues to plummet as the effect of the latest redundancies becomes ever more obvious to viewers.

Inexperienced presenters are being thrown in at the deep end with embarrassing consequences, while "technical difficulties" mean reporters often gabble on in silence, faders having been left closed by raw and under-supported directors. Captions are frequently misspelled and are sometimes amusingly wrong: a recent interview from Westminster was billed as being "Live from Verdun, eastern France".

WITH ITV's credit rating downgraded to junk, a 20 percent collapse in advertising revenue and redundancies all round the company, jobless former staff will be delighted to learn of the circumstances surrounding the poster campaign for the new series of *Harry Hill's TV Burp*.

A top photographer was flown over first class from New York, along with two assistants and his equipment. The shoot cost more than £50,000. The end product? A picture of the back of Hill's head.

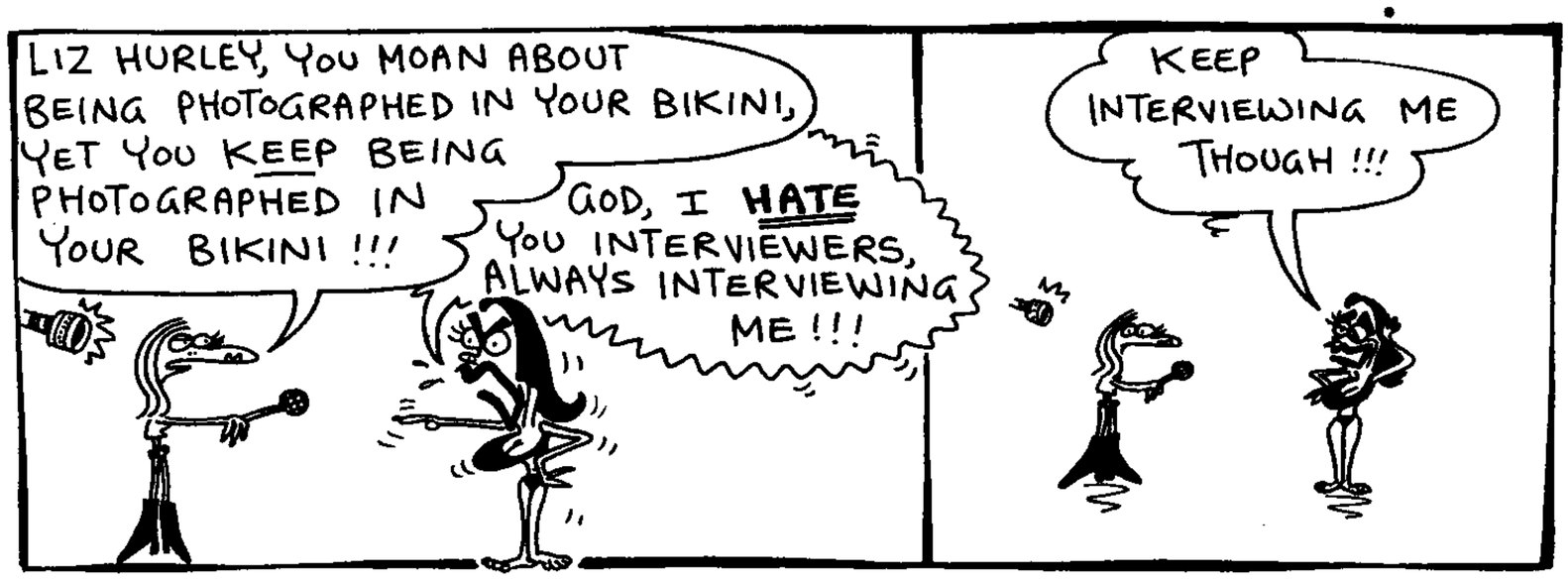
THE 2007 series of BBC2 reality show *The Restaurant* culminated with competitors having to try to cook and serve a full service at presenter Raymond Blanc's Michelin-starred eaterie Le Manoir Aux Quat'Saisons. But this year's finale was rather different.

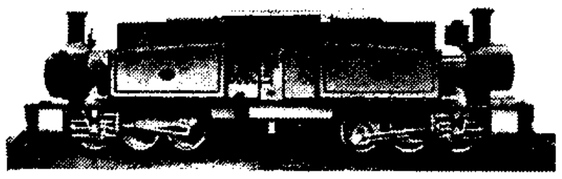
Perhaps reasoning that the repeated shots of the building's exterior and luscious close-ups of sparkling glassware and crisp linen which punctuated the show's eight-week run were publicity enough for Mr Blanc's business interests, contestants were challenged to prepare and serve a five-course meal on board what the programme called "Europe's most famous train", the Orient Express, as it chugged through Kent.

And who is the co-owner of Le Manoir Aux Quat'Saisons, which recently signed a new contract "extending Raymond Blanc's services until 2012"? Why Orient-Express Hotels Ltd, a fact curiously omitted from the programme's admiring voice-over!

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


LIZ HURLEY, YOU MOAN ABOUT BEING PHOTOGRAPHED IN YOUR BIKINI, YET YOU KEEP BEING PHOTOGRAPHED IN YOUR BIKINI !!!
GOD, I HATE YOU INTERVIEWERS, ALWAYS INTERVIEWING ME !!!
KEEP INTERVIEWING ME THOUGH !!!



SIGNAL FAILURES

WHILE Labour MPs wake up belatedly to the omission of high-speed trains from the government's consultation on Heathrow's third runway (highlighted in *Eye* 1199 almost a year ago), the growing support for a new electric railway has put the British Airports Authority (BAA), which owns Heathrow, on the defensive.

Last month BAA held a high-speed-rail "conference" to rubbish fast trains as an alternative to a new runway. The *Guardian* dutifully reported the event as a "blow" to "Tory plans".

But hang on. High-speed rail plans have been developed for years without support from the Tories (who only adopted the idea recently), and cutting Heathrow short-haul flights is just one of the justifications for high-speed rail. A new railway up the centre of England, for example, would leave existing rail routes free to carry more local and regional passengers and freight than they can now (currently, mixing all types of train on the same tracks requires clearing the decks several times an hour for 125mph trains). The knock-on effect would be a cut in road traffic on many of England's most congested arteries, to the benefit of those making essential road journeys and the environment.

BAA is now reduced to pleading that Britain must build a high-speed railway *and* the extra runway. As if. Its best hope is that Gordon Brown signs Britain up to the runway in such a way that future Tory ministers could say they can't scrap the project. The omens are good for BAA. On 29 October Brown confirmed: "We said as a government that we supported in principle a third runway." On the same day, transport secretary Geoff Hoon said a new strategy group would study "longer-term solutions" including "consideration of wholly new rail lines, including high-speed rail". Labour has knocked back the rail alternative so often (Eyes passim since 2002) that it's still at "consideration" stage.

PS: The government was delighted last week when BAA announced £230m for London's £16bn Crossrail, which Brown insists must have some private finance. It must be a coincidence that Brown's Heathrow runway decision is expected next month.

Fuelled you!

WHILE profits shrink at companies exposed to competition, Britain's biggest bus firms are enjoying whopping rises.

This year they blamed fare rises of 10 or 20 percent on rising world oil prices, failing to mention their fixed-price fuel deals (*Eye* 1216). Last week **FirstGroup** boss Moir Lockhead unveiled results for the six months to 30 September, telling investors: "Our UK Bus division has delivered another very strong performance. Total revenue rose by 7.1 percent to £578.6m as a result of volume growth, including concessions, and pricing." Profit increased 26 percent to £60m; passengers increased just 2 percent.

"Concessions" are significant. Free OAP bus travel (paid for by local councils) went nationwide in England in April, so the elderly no longer notice fare rises. People too poor or young to have cars are stuck with buses as "pricing" is adjusted, and on most bus routes there's only one firm.

A **Stagecoach** trading statement showed a 9.2 percent rise in UK bus revenue in the 24 weeks to 12 October. And in the first six months of 2008, **Arriva's** UK buses delivered a 20 percent rise in profits. Announcing the second fare rise in eight months, an Arriva bus boss explained in July: "Like all road users, Arriva is feeling the impact of increasing fuel costs." But last month Arriva told shareholders: "Our hedging policy is protecting the group from material impact during 2008. The final average price paid for fuel in 2008 is anticipated to be 28.2p per litre, before delivery and duty."

Now oil prices are at their lowest for over a year, the big bus firms can fix cheap fuel again; but that's unlikely to prevent fare rises next year. Recession could hit those firms' rail revenues, especially where job losses reduce commuting; but they could make up for that by squeezing even more from their captive bus passengers.

'Dr B Ching'

PLANE STUPID?

WITH decisions imminent over extra runways for Heathrow and Stansted, what of the UK's other airports where operators are pushing for more flights from bigger airports?

East Midlands Airport: EMA has applied for a runway extension, which it says is to allow larger freight planes to land. Planes are already allowed to take off and land at EMA throughout the night because of its distance from a major city. But there are thousands of people living in villages nearby who already suffer from disturbed sleep thanks to the noise (see *Eye 1166*). They fear an extension would open the way for jumbo jets and allow EMA to expand its holiday flights business. A decision from the local planners is expected within six months.

Leeds Bradford Airport: Private equity firm Bridgepoint recently bought the airport and will submit plans for a £70m expansion and revamp of the terminals this month to cope with more flights and passengers – from under 2m passengers a year to 5m by 2013.

Robin Hood Airport: This South Yorkshire airport has launched a draft masterplan, aiming for more than 10m passengers a year by 2030. Bizarrely, the plan includes 750 new homes near the airport access road – all of which will be affected by the noise and pollution.

Bristol Airport: A massive two-storey "walkway" (four times the length of the terminal) is being mooted here, which campaigners claim is a sneaky attempt at expansion. North Somerset Council barred the airport from building the structure under "permitted development" earlier this year. Despite being told to go through the normal planning application process, the airport is now asking for a certificate of lawful proposed use or development.

Lydd Airport: Plans for a 444m runway extension and a new terminal in Romney Marsh, an internationally important wildlife site, were condemned last month by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds as "one of the most inappropriate and dangerous locations to run a large airport". Shepway council will consider the application in the new year.

MEDICINE BALLS

Think of the children

WELL done, Department of Health. With the help of assorted royal colleges, it has produced an excellent document, *Commissioning Safe and Sustainable Specialised Paediatric Services*, spelling out why we need to limit the increasingly complex treatment of sick children with rare diseases to centres with the expertise, staff and resources to do the job properly.

The Bristol inquiry made similar recommendations seven years ago that, according to consultant paediatric cardiologist Ted Baker, "have yet to be fully implemented… in particular the need to undertake an adequate volume of work to promote safe practice".

Resistance to reorganisation is still widespread. Surgeons are self-protective about their desire to have a go at rare operations and may not want to relocate to a larger unit, where their work can be properly scrutinised. Politicians are reluctant to close down units in key constituencies and the public and press cry foul if they try. And patients want to be treated as close to home as possible (although most parents would travel anywhere if it meant their child was much more likely to live).

There are now 23 different specialised paediatric services, from bone marrow transplantation to brain surgery, which rely on each other's expertise. This makes planning very complicated but the new report is a consensus agreement on which services need to be provided alongside each other on the same site (eg cancer care needs to have a critical-care unit on hand in case children go into organ failure after chemotherapy). So there really is no excuse not to get on with it.

There are still 11 hospitals performing child heart surgery, with some struggling with too few staff and trying to avoid another Bristol. Heart surgeons at least know their figures, but there is an equal number of child brain surgeons, some without specialist accreditation, who don't collect and compare results and have no idea about the quality of their care. They get away with it because most parents of children with brain tumours are so grateful for any care they don't question whether it's up to par.

In the absence of legislation, the only way to ensure that critically ill children get a good standard of care is if those purchasing the care have the balls to insist on it. The DoH is now dominated by two surgeons, Ara Darzi and Bruce Keogh, who know little about general practice but should at least be able to bring surgeons into line. The wannabe NHS chief executive, Mark Britnell, is obsessive about "world-class commissioning" and this new document tells him how to do it, with the miraculous agreement of the royal colleges. If we don't stop the dabblers now, we never will.

● **Several ENT surgeons have written to M.D. to endorse his view (*Eye* 1220) that the NHS is wrong to deny girls (and boys) the chance to be vaccinated with Gardasil, which protects against more strains of virus than the government's chosen vaccine (Cervarix).**

As well as stopping most genital warts and a lot of cervical cancer, it could also prevent many laryngeal warts, which are extremely unpleasant and costly to treat. The virus is acquired during childbirth and some children suffer "gross tracheal problems" that continue into adult life. This might be avoided if the NHS had access to a licensed vaccine widely available in Europe and America.

M.D.

A BLOODY MIRACLE

SURPRISE, surprise. Twenty years after Lord Owen, the former Labour health secretary, was told that key documents relating to his efforts as a minister in the 1970s to ensure the country's haemophiliacs received "clean" blood products had been shredded, they have miraculously appeared on his desk.

Thousands of haemophiliacs and others receiving transfusions were infected with HIV and the fatal liver disease hepatitis C through contaminated blood imported from high-risk donors, prisoners and the like, in America. The practice continued long after concerns were raised and many haemophiliacs have since died or are chronically ill.

After a long campaign by activists, this scandal is finally the subject of a public inquiry by the former solicitor general, Lord Archer of Sandwell.

Lord Owen was keen to give evidence: in 1974, he had promised that the UK would end the importation of unsafe blood products, and that the UK would be self-sufficient. He had been shocked to discover in the 80s, therefore, that after he moved on to the Foreign Office his pledge had been ignored and many more people had been infected. When he tried to obtain copies of his ministerial documents, he was told they had been "inadvertently destroyed by an overzealous junior civil servant". Other key blood-policy documents were also apparently shredded and excluded from the government's 2006 report.

Owen's newly discovered papers, however, counter successive government suggestions that there was no meaningful commitment because the risks were not fully understood.

Campaigners still hope Archer will produce a hard-hitting report that provides at least most of the truth, an overdue official apology and compensation on a scale to match that given in other countries.

CONCILIA PUTRIDA*

PERV'S PERKS

MORRIS LIGHTFOOT, a Lib Dem councillor with seats on both North Yorkshire county and Harrogate borough councils, was convicted at the end of October of three computer sex offences. He admitted attempting to "groom" a 13-year-old girl in an internet chat room, using sexually explicit language and asking if she would meet him for sex.

Unfortunately for Lightfoot, his young friend, "Tina", was actually the site's male administrator, posing as a teen after becoming suspicious about postings by "Moozzaa", as Lightfoot, 55, called himself online. Harrogate magistrates referred the case to York crown court for sentencing on 1 December – indicating that they felt he deserved a tougher sentence than the maximum 12 months in jail that they could impose.

If he gets more than three months, as seems likely, Lightfoot will automatically be disqualified from sitting as a councillor. In the meantime, of course, the decent thing would be to resign. His party has kicked him out, Harrogate council's leader and North Yorkshire's chief exec have both called on him to quit, and the voters certainly want rid of him.

But the decent thing, as we have seen, is not Lightfoot's thing. If he resigns he will forfeit nearly £1,000 in councillor's allowances payable before his next court appearance. And that would never do.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

I am writing to advice tenants to take care when they are putting there heads out the window for any reason. There is a damager that you may get struck by some falling missionary.

Please take care and avoid putting yourself at unnecessary risk by limiting the amount of time you expose yourself out the window.

Manchester council letter to residents of tower block

ROUND THE BEND

BACK in March we wrote about Suffolk county council's overpaid new chief executive, Andrea Hill. She had persuaded the yokels to fork out £218,000 a year – £70,000 more than her predecessor and 30 grand more than our esteemed prime minister (*Eye* 1206).

We noted that in her previous job, at Bedfordshire CC, Andrea – who gets cross when people don't pronounce her name *Arn*drea – was notorious for her love of psychobabble and "blue-sky thinking". She spent thousands on "psychometric tests" for job applicants and baffled staff with lectures about something called "the sigmoid wave", which, she believes, stimulates "continuous improvement". One resident told the *Eye*: "It sounds like something out of a brain-washing cult."

It hasn't taken Andrea – sorry, Arndrea – long in Suffolk to combine her enthusiasm for batty theories and spending taxpayers' money. Four hundred staff are soon to be sent on a "leadership improvement programme" featuring a "communicational psychology" course – a snip, in these straitened times, at £1,000 a head, or £400,000 in all. Last month even Suffolk's ruling Tories baulked after Andrea advertised for a "diary secretary" on a package worth £30,000 a year. They told her to withdraw the ad after the *East Anglian Daily Times* pointed out that she already *had* a full-time personal assistant, who might reasonably be expected to keep her diary in order.

PS: "Sigmoid", meaning "S-shaped", is the name given to the "bendy" final stretch of the human colon, just before the rectum. So that's where Andrea gets her ideas!

BARNET BANKER

MIKE FREER, Tory leader of Barnet council, has come up with a good explanation for why he's not to blame for losing £27.4m the London borough put into dodgy Icelandic banks (*Eye* 1222).

When challenged by Lib Dem group leader Jack Cohen at the council's cabinet and overview scrutiny committee to explain how many times in the past two years he had met finance officers to review the council's investment portfolio, he replied that, er, he hadn't. Not once. Not as far as he could remember, anyway. In fact, the first he knew about the council having money in Iceland was when news broke that its banks had collapsed. But then why should he bother his pretty head with money matters? In a former life, Cllr Freer was only, ahem, a banker, after all.

So was it all the finance officers' fault, then? Let's hope no blame attaches to Barnet's chief executive, Leo Boland, who has resigned – not because of the Icelandic business, we hasten to add, but because he has been poached by London mayor Boris Johnson to become chief exec of the Greater London Authority… in charge of a £3bn budget. Gulp!

Boris said last week: "Leo brings considerable local government experience to this important role. He is known for running a tight ship with a healthy balance sheet [*sic*] and below-inflation council tax rises for borough residents."

FACT: Leo Boland joined Barnet in 2001. In 2003 Barnet's council tax increased by 24 percent; between 2002 and 2006 it went up by an average of 8 percent a year. Is Boris talking out of his sigmoid colon again?

● A FAVOURITE excuse trotted out by council leaders in recent weeks, following the Iceland fiasco, has been that they were given relatively good credit ratings, at least for short-term loans, until shortly before they failed. How could councils such as Barnet (£27m), Kent (£50m) and Nottingham (£42m) have known that their taxpayers' money wasn't safe? Perhaps they should have taken a leaf out of tiny East Northamptonshire district council's book. ENDC had invested £4m in Iceland but withdrew it early *last year* after the council's financial advisers pointed out that it was risky. The council's Conservative leader, Andy Mercer, said that after a "risk management assessment" the council had decided to reinvest the dosh elsewhere, albeit at a lower rate. Perhaps Barnet's Cllr Freer could ask his party colleague for some tips.

KOPPING OUT

SO FAREWELL, then, to Newham council's Keystone Kops, aka the parks constabulary (*Eyes passim*), which is being quietly disbanded – as predicted in *Eye* 1205 eight months ago.

So embarrassing has the long-running Keystones fiasco been for Mayor "Sir" Robin Wales that the council has neglected to announce the closure and the *Newham Recorder* – the local Wales fanzine – has kept schtum, too.

"Sir" Robin has decided to abandon the tarnished dream of running his own private police force on the advice of a review carried out by CivicWatch, Westminster council's anti-antisocial behaviour team. Odd that a prominent Labour council should need to commission a special report costing thousands of pounds from a Tory authority, to tell it what it already knows. Although, as Westminster council's former leader Sir Simon Milton told the *Grauniad* last year: "Frankly, there is not much ideological difference to the way Conservative Westminster is run from Labour Newham." And, of course, Newham's chief executive, Joe "Vera" Duckworth, was formerly deputy chief exec at Westminster.

Meanwhile, a rather pathetic online petition calling on the council to save the Keystones has been set up. Unfortunately, apart from members of the parks constabulary and a handful of their relatives, the ungrateful citizens of the borough have not been rushing to sign it.

MERRY DANCE

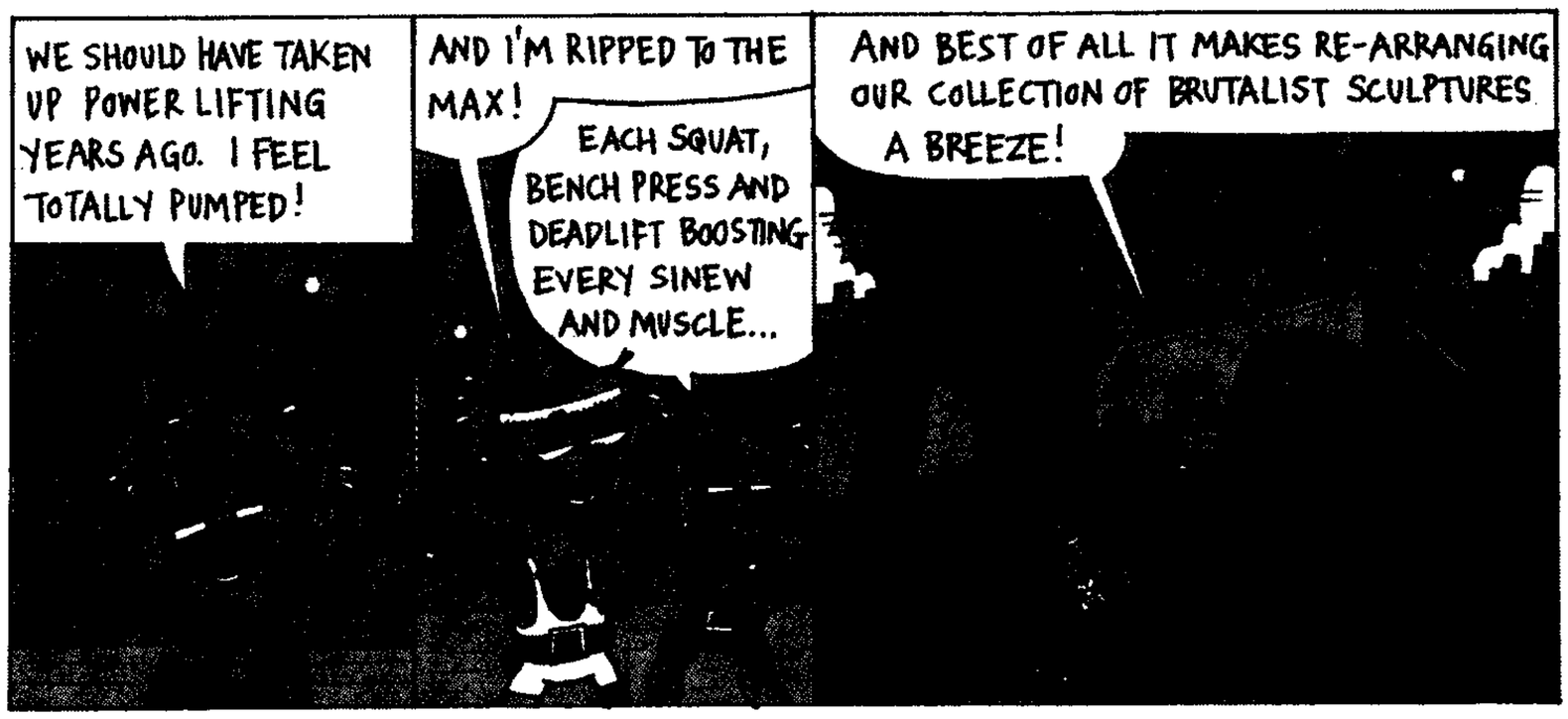
ANOTHER council bigwig who has his spending priorities sorted is Salford's Labour leader, John Merry. He wants to spend £175,000 increasing the size and frequency of the council's pisspoor propaganda sheet, *LIFE IN [sic] Salford*, which is rightly consigned to the recycling bin by most residents as soon as it arrives. Part of the dosh is meant to come from "a redirection of spend on recruitment and public notices advertising" – ie freezing out any independent publications that do not toe the council's line.

Merry's claim that *LIFE* etc is "politically neutral" has been blown away by the resignation from its board of Lib Dem councillor Steve Cooke, who complained that it was nothing but "a propaganda vehicle for the cabinet… an often misleading… relentlessly and unjustifiably upbeat publication".

Opposition Tories "called in" the decision and overturned it with an 8-1 majority at a scrutiny committee meeting, only for Merry to plough on by taking it to full council later this month… where Labour's inbuilt majority will enable it to be forced through.

THIS ISSUE'S Latin logo celebrates Bournemouth council's nomination in the Philistines of the Year category of the 2008 Rotten Boroughs awards, for banning the use by staff of Latin-derived expressions such as "vice versa", "status quo", "NB" and "eg" because they might confuse the ignorant. Mirabilis!

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


WE SHOULD HAVE TAKEN UP POWER LIFTING YEARS AGO. I FEEL TOTALLY PUMPED!
AND I'M RIPPED TO THE MAX!
EACH SQUAT, BENCH PRESS AND DEADLIFT BOOSTING EVERY SINEW AND MUSCLE...
AND BEST OF ALL IT MAKES RE-ARRANGING OUR COLLECTION OF BRUTALIST SCULPTURES A BREEZE!

NOOKS and CORNERS

EVERY cloud has a silver lining, and one by-product of the recession is the cancellation of fatuous "iconic" buildings. Mercifully, the 120m tall so-called U2 tower designed by Milord Foster's firm for Dublin has just been abandoned; now we must hope for the demise in London of the overweening and colossal "Shard" at London Bridge and the Doon Street tower (*Eye* 1218).

Another project which ought to be cancelled is the 33-storey tower proposed for, of all places, Gravesend. It is hard to understand what the old riverside port and resort, the last resting place of Pocahontas, has done to deserve what Gravesham borough council is contemplating.

Despite being ravaged in the 1960s to make way for a new civic centre, the streets in the town centre preserve their character and several old timber-clad or framed Kentish buildings survive. But Gravesend has the misfortune to be in the area zoned as Thames Gateway and is not far from the new Ebbsfleet station and the wretched Bluewater shopping centre, so Edinburgh House Estates is proposing a £100m "radical regeneration".

This entails expansion of the existing St George's Shopping Centre (owned by the developer) in what is ironically called the town's "Heritage Quarter". Most of the buildings are to be, on average, 7 storeys high, but the glory will be the "iconic" tower block, designed by Leslie Jones architects of London (who are also responsible for the controversial scheme to spoil the Queensgate Market in Huddersfield: *Eye* 1213). It will of course stand out as there are no other tall buildings for miles.

Not everyone is impressed. English Heritage thinks the proposal is "totally out of context" and will seriously affect the character of the conservation area. Urban Gravesham, the civic society for Gravesend and Northfleet, is not opposed to development in principle but is volubly opposed to the centre of Gravesend being "turned into yet another anonymous shopping centre surrounded by hi-rise development". It argues that "the developers are simply too greedy and that the Council has been too soft in allowing this monstrous scheme to progress to planning application stage".

The council seems rattled. At a recent meeting, security guards barred entry to anyone wearing the civic society's "UG!" t-shirt, but relented when a group of women threatened to take them off.

MEANWHILE, English Heritage (along with Westminster city council) is challenging the secretary of state's decision to approve the proposed tower in Doon Street near Waterloo. But when it comes to protecting school buildings, especially Victorian or Edwardian Board Schools, it seems terrified of offending the government.

One board school which deserves listing is that in Clarence Street, Bolton, designed by local architect Jonathan Simpson. Completed in 1889, the red brick building later became Bolton Community College and housed the first Women's Institute to be established in an industrial town. Bolton city council's development brief describes the unlisted building (which it owns) as "of architectural merit", "worthy of retention" and "a significant landmark feature". Curious, then, that the council began demolishing it last month, having approved its own planning application by delegated powers rather than taking the demolition proposal to committee.

Why? For once, a sound school building is not being destroyed to make way for a new academy but to create... a temporary car park. However, its location, said a spokesman for these municipal vandals, "at a gateway to the town centre, means it is a prime site for a landmark development as part of the regeneration of the town centre area".

Happily, SAVE Britain's Heritage has secured an injunction against Bolton council. Demolition work has ceased until the matter is resolved in the high court. This is a brave, because fraught, tactic by SAVE as it could be saddled with high legal costs if it loses, but it says: "Bolton cannot afford to lose good, well-built, well-designed, well-maintained civic buildings like this. The council might as well be mounting a Baedecker bombing raid on its own town centre."

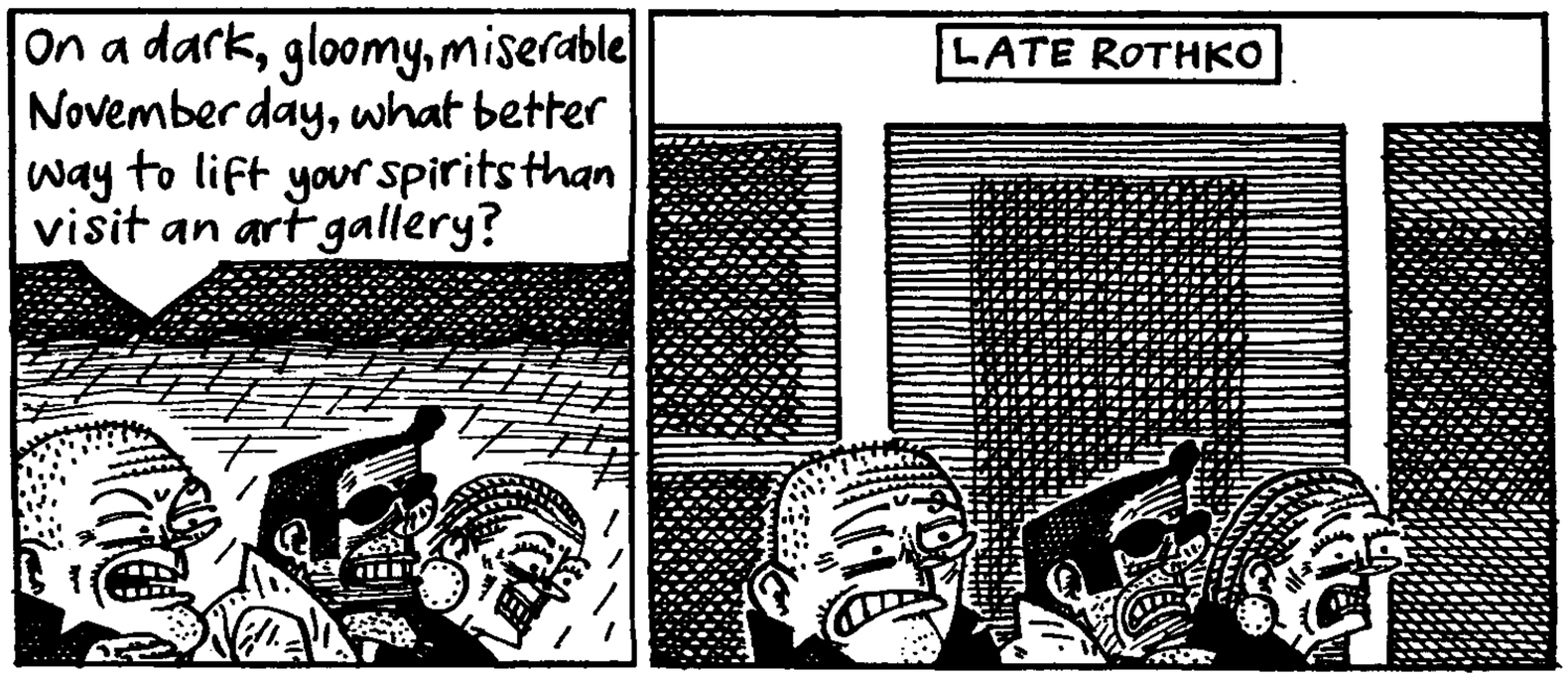
ELSEWHERE in Lancashire, there is the scandal of the deliberate neglect of the old Town Hall in Oldham. A Greek Revival temple of 1841, later extended, it is one of the most distinguished historic buildings to survive in the town. However, although listed at grade II, the old Town Hall was simply abandoned by Oldham council when the banal new Civic Centre was completed in the 1970s. The result is, to quote a recent issue of the *Oldham Evening Chronicle*, that "Chunks of masonry are falling from the ceilings on a daily basis... Fireplaces, brass door decorations, furniture and plaster mouldings have been plundered... Historic civic furniture, chairs, decorations and bookcases stored behind steel doors inside are being moved out urgently before the ballroom ceiling falls in on them".

The fear is that the building won't survive the winter – which would solve the problem for the council, of course. Such is civic pride in Oldham.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH



I-SPY *Pristina & Sheffield*

Submitted by Peter Williams & Andrew Richards. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

SOME people – notably the press – have curiously short memories. One of the big arts stories in the past weeks has been the idea that the Royal Opera House should have a northern base in Manchester – an idea that's been casually reported as everything from "talks in early stages" to "government gives green light".

The only consistency in the coverage has been a general tone of wide-eyed excitement, taken straight from press handouts puffing the thing as though it were the most spectacular cultural initiative since the building of the pyramids. In fact the idea is about as old as the pyramids and surfaces with every 20 years or so.

The last attempt to revive it was in the 1980s, when the Palace Theatre in Manchester was expensively refurbished to accommodate Royal Opera House shows that did, eventually, make their way north. What happened? It proved ruinously costly and the project was killed off.

The only reason it's been massaged back is because culture secretary Andy Burnham represents a constituency in Greater Manchester and is susceptible to claims that the government owes the area after taking away its promised super-casino. It's also no coincidence that one of his "special advisers" is a woman who was involved in setting up the new Manchester International Festival: a fiercely ambitious operation that sees itself as a contender for the big league alongside Salzburg, Edinburgh & co. To do that, it would have to field some serious, big-league opera. Hence the pressure.

But this is all about status and very little to do with need. Manchester audiences are not dying for lack of opera, and if the Palace Theatre gets yet another refurb – at a likely cost of £100m – it begs huge questions about the future of the Lowry Centre, which was built only eight years ago (for £116m) for the very purpose of taking touring opera.

WNO, Opera North and the Lowry have all been noticeably muted in their welcome of the ROH plans, and for obvious reasons. These plans are damaging, silly and a waste of everybody's time. The only consolation is that, as we slide into recession, no one's going to find that £100m. So don't get too excited.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

LUVVIES

Then he took me in his arms and held me to his chest and said, "Believe in me. Trust me. I am not God, but I am Antonioni." I thought, "My goodness, I would walk through fire for you."'

PETER BOWLES on working with Michelangelo Antonioni, *Saturday Telegraph Magazine*

Submitted by Jo Noble.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Letters

Danish pasting

Sir,

Not the first time you have used the name of Madeleine McCann as a source of levity (Eye 1222, page 18). Compare this to your craven stance at the time of the international furore over the publication of the Muhammad cartoons in a Danish newspaper in September 2005. Those cartoons were commented on in over 50 countries while you crouched silent and trembling behind the parapet, but get the distressing plight of a helpless little girl in your sights and it's all guns blazing in search of a cheap laugh.

BILL PEART,

Earby, Lancs.

Journal of record

Sir,

I can't believe your glaring error about those on "that yacht" on page 18 of issue 1222. You cast aspersions on Chantelle's good character. She was not "off Big Brother 7". Chantelle Houghton was in fact on celebrity Big Brother (series 4). No doubt you'll remember she won millions of fans as the only non-celeb on the show.

If you meant Chanelle Hayes then you're still wrong. Her moment of fame came on Big Brother 8, not 7, in 2007.

If I ever get my name in Private Eye I want it to be for this – it's my proudest moment.

Kind Regards,
ANNA COOK,

Via email.

Opera buffo

Sir,

Viewers of the Metropolitan Opera's Salome production left detumescent as the camera panned away from the money shot of Finnish soprano Karita Mattila at the conclusion of the Dance of the Seven Veils should equip themselves with a magnifying glass and turn to page 137 of "The Toughest Show on Earth" – the memoirs of former Met General Manager Joseph Volpe.

Volpe recalls how, at the opera photo-call, he hunted down a New York Times snapper and threatened her with dire consequences if pictures of a naked Mattila were to appear in the paper; he later justified his decision to include the full-frontal shot of Mattila's "landing strip" in the book by quoting the statuesque diva's response to his concerns about the video-recording of the show: "You'd better show the full nudity! I didn't strip down for nothing!"

LINDSAY THOMSON,

Via email.

In denial?

Sir,

David Porter, the editor of the Tameside Advertiser (or Pravdatiser as it is known locally) assures readers that local papers are not manipulated by Tameside council (Eye 1222).

This letter was in response to Eye 1220 where you reported on a government paper which made claims of such manipulation.

The local council are similarly in denial, replying to my Freedom of Information Act request with a blanket response that no regular meetings with the press occur and that stories have not been interfered with.

What is interesting is that while the editor takes the time to write to the Eye on this matter he has not seen fit to write about it in his own "Pravdatiser".

Odd.

Yours,
ANTHONY DAVID JONES MA,

Ashton under Lyne, Tameside.

Lookalike

Salmond

Shrek

Sir,

Has anybody spotted our first minister at Holyrood?

ARCHIE SHAW STEWART,

Doune, Perthshire.

"On the plus side, the recession is seeing the return of traditional dishes that had become deeply unfashionable"

Gavel bashed

Sir,

Re: Dame Suzi Leather (Called to Ordure, 1221). A Dame called Leather – what a satirical gift – and how fascinating to have a list of her "accoutrements" for a recent House of Commons appearance: "...devore-style top... chic, feathered hairdo... gushy self-satisfaction... sultry smile... husky subservience". Cor, steamy stuff! Can't wait to hear what the chaps are wearing this Parliamentary season. What a cracking idea to let Silvie Krin pen this week's dispatch.

Yours sincerely,
TRISH CONNOLLY,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See

"You do not know me. I am depositing a large sum of money in your bank account. There is no catch. Just spend and enjoy."

Punching the Remote

Sir,

Much as Remote Controller is entertaining, it must be pointed out that Stephen Fry did not make a documentary for BBC2 about "depression', as stated. It was in fact about manic depression, or bipolar disorder, which is a quite different prospect.

Yours,
HARRIETTE DAVIES,

Via email.

Sir,

According to Remote Controller, if production of Newsnight and Crimewatch "really" move to Scotland and Wales respectively we'll have purely Scottish reports and Welsh-sounding crime reconstructions. Clearly that would suggest that programmes produced in London would bore the rest of the country to death by having Londoners covering local London affairs.

That could never happen, could it?

Yours,
PAUL COYNE,

Glasgow.

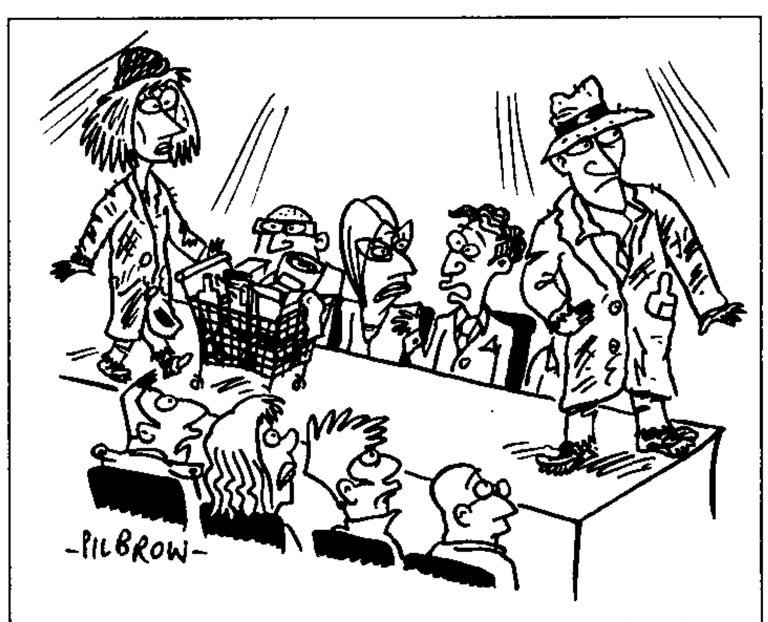
Sir,

Remote Controller reckons that minor Scottish football games are reported on the BBC news while games of similar stature in England are ignored. Tosh! Luckily, he makes my point far better than I ever could by wondering why Inverness Caledonian Thistle results are read out on the news while results for Lincoln City and Bristol Rovers are not. Simple: Caley Thistle are in Scotland's top division, Bristol Rovers and Lincoln City are in the third and fourth tiers of English football.

Sounds like there's another southern metropolitan outfit having trouble integrating with the rest of the UK!

Yours,
GRAEME GARDINER,

Fearn, Tain (way north of Inverness).



"It's what they'll all be wearing in 2009"

Pedantry Corner

... Re Treasure Island Times. Mr L.J. Silver did not own the Hispaniola. This ship was purchased by Squire John Trelawney in Bristol. In fact, Mr L.J. Silver is never mentioned as an owner of any ship having previously served under Captain Flint on his ship, The Walrus.

MICHAEL O'BRIEN.

... In the cartoon on page 11 of Eye 1222, an officer of "The Council" berates Jack (he of Beanstalk fame), telling him "You can't just throw down magic beans without planning permission."

I feel compelled to point out that as Jack seems to have been a farmer, he could sow them with impunity. Section 55 paragraph (2)(e) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 specifically excludes agriculture as a land use requiring planning permission.

ART E. P. EYE.

... (1) The "On me 'ead, son" cartoon (Eye 1221) may not have respected the detail of classical mythology, but is in distinguished company. Heine's poem Der Atlas (set by Scubert) says "... die ganze Welt der Schmerzen muss ich tragen" ("The whole world of sorrows I must carry"). The physical burden of an emotional state does not seem to contain much reference to the original heaven of mythology.

(2) Why do you use the heading "Pedantry Corner" when you elect to set out the material in a column?

LAWRENCE WRAGG.

... Re the discussion of the Mandelson motto "Salve Nauticus", I always greet my local canal-boat skippers with a cheery, "Abyssus Nauta!' and receive a heartfelt reply of, "Adepto Vos!" Try it, it works!

Salve,
BENNY DICTINE.

... The recent Ad Nauseam, highlighting the Cadbury spokesperson acknowledging "We would not do anything that would seek to encourage people to eat more chocolate," was in fact merely underlining what you guys had rightly pointed out a few issues earlier – that Cadbury's advertising – specifically the highly popular, highly ineffective Gorilla ad for Dairy Milk – doesn't work, and drives sales down. So truth, not lies, in advertising, for once.

With regards to Apparently – Eyesight – surely them what is short sighted would more easily be able to read the larger font...

VICKY ZIMMERMAN.

***Mike Barfield replies:** What a Clever Vick. I considered this point when I first had the idea for the cartoon. I felt it was OK because the larger lettering is the one that long-sighted people would read the most easily at a greater distance. Being long-sighted myself (not a great gift when you do cartoons), I'm sick of short-sighted people showing off how close they can read small print without glasses. I was sure they'd claim the tiny lettering for their own. By the way, I'm also second-sighted. I just knew someone would get in touch about this.*

Letter from **Buenos Aires**

from Our Own Correspondent

THE timing and location were perfect. The International Bar Association met last month in Buenos Aires – officially for its annual conference but unofficially to consider the opportunities presented by global economic meltdown, in a country still recovering from its $93bn default in 2001.

The first lessons about what happens when economies fail were pretty basic. Our gangs had a field day, prompting organisers to urge wealthy delegates to remove the conference badges that identified them as easy targets – but not before armed well-wishers had already robbed some gringos in an airport shuttle bus.

The IBA even had difficulty setting up the conference, after our customs officers refused to release promotional material, technical equipment and other goods they had impounded. The threats and bluster that are lawyers' stock-in-trade made little difference; and nor did appeals from assorted VIPS until there was agreement over some hefty ad hoc payments.

In fairness, our customs boys have every reason to take their job seriously. It is the less well off who always suffer the most when we succumb to our periodic yet catastrophic import binges: for a time, our industry and agriculture do well, exports go up, the middle classes develop a taste for the finer things the world overseas can offer; then global economic conditions change, our earnings fall and the currency collapses again.

Such a cycle culminated in our 2001 crisis; and during the conference lawyers were busy finalising our last $6.7bn payment to the Paris Club of creditors who bailed us out seven years ago. This was familiar territory for Argentina, which hosted one of the first and more spectacular international capital market crashes when British banks piled in to bonds financing our railways, mortgages and public works in the 1880s in pursuit of outlandish returns. When the market crashed a few years later, it was the Bank of England that mounted a rescue.

Many at the IBA jolly were disappointed not to hear directly from Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, our president and herself a lawyer by training. She has a colourful reputation for dealing with dissent, but it seems unlikely this would have prevented the IBA from booking her. After all, the keynote address at last year's conference in Singapore was by Lee Kuan Yew, the island state's Minister Mentor who for 50 years stood for little nonsense.

Perhaps when the conference agenda was worked out some months ago our dear leader was wary of addressing a room filled with so many Yankee lawyers, since it was a US assistant attorney in Miami who had alleged her 2007 election campaign had been funded with a suitcase of cash from Hugo Chavez, self-styled leader of Venezuela's progressive revolution. Chavez gave generously to bail us out in 2001 but Washington despised the socialist politics of state ownership he shared with our own generalissimo with a heart, Juan Peron.

But how times have changed. By the time the lawyers had actually got down to business, President Kirchner would have had no need to worry. With free world governments buying up banks and insurance companies, one delegate offered greetings from post-capitalist America. It seems we are all Peronists and Chavistas now!

Fan mail, cont.

Sir,

I'm a bit sick of football and rugby getting all the attention as usual.

What about "minority" sports, such as cycling, in which we actually had some success.

VAL O'DROME,
Via email.

Sir,

Ok, enough's enough.

First it was the tidal wave of footie-related names, then the fast food puns and now the world of Ballroom Dancing, if the sneaky moniker "C. Quinn' (Letters, 1222) is to be believed.

What next? Plundering the annals of Prog Rock for a quick quip?

Yours,
EMMA ST LAKENPALMER,
Via email.

Sir,

I have no need for a football-related name. I simply loyally support my team through thick and thin and have done so for many a year. My singing and cheering is as vociferous as anyone's and I feel it especially incumbent upon me to encourage my team if we go a goal down. Yet on these occasions what do I hear from the opposition supporters? "You're not singing Ernie Moore!!" is the constant cruel refrain. Why me? It is so unfair.

Yours faithfully,
ERNEST MOORE,
Via email.

Sir,

I am heartily sick of this publication's current obsession with puerile humour in the form of silly, made-up names at the foot of letters.

It's obvious that they're all men who apparently have nothing better to do than indulge in schoolboy jokes.

Why can't you all just grow up, for heaven's sake?

Yours very, very annoyed,
E. NORMA SONOKAS,
Via email.

Lookalike

Wood **Plastic**

Sir,

Whilst browsing the popular online car boot sale eBay™, I came across the following elderly second-hand plaything for the young and wondered if it could have been modelled from life?

Best wishes,
ALASDAIR SWANSON,
Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I'm sure you'll have a field day in December, come January."
TONY ADAMS, Setanta Sports 1
(Liam Milner)

"I'm sure they [Spurs] will get another opportunity, hopefully before the final whistle."
STEVE CLARIDGE, Radio 5 Live
(Seth Gillman)

"You know sometimes football turns on the slightest biscuit of good fortune."
DAVID PLEAT, Radio 4
(Eamon McAllister)

"On the Lions tour in 1997 Mark Regan and Barry Williams blew up, but it was literally handbags."
JEREMY GUSCOTT, BBC Sport website
(David Paxton)

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

●"Grossology is the impolite science of the human body," vice president Holly Hughes told visitors to the latest exhibition at the South Florida Science Museum in West Palm Beach, "teaching children and adults about all the embarrassing yet necessary functions of the human body. In the 'Vomit Center,' you can guess the correct sequence of events that sets off barfing, while the 'Y U Stink' exhibit allows you to match revolting odours to the part of the body that produces them. Or why not visit the 'Tooty Toot Toot' area, and learn how vibrations of skin around the anus create a unique fart sound?

"Other exhibits include 'The Burp Machine,' which is a Disneyland white-knuckle ride into the world of dyspepsia. Over here, kids can

climb up a twelve-foot wall of pimples, warts, and blackheads, then slide down on the simulated pus, and there's the 'Not Snot' stand, showing how the human nose works. The whole exhibition is a thrilling way of educating kids about things they love to talk about, but which their parents don't like to discuss, and we're expecting 120,000 visitors over the next year. It must be the grossest exhibition we've ever organised, but it's useful, because it allows the whole family to learn without feeling that they're learning." *(Palm Beach Daily News, 22/9/08. Spotter: Verner Wheelock)*

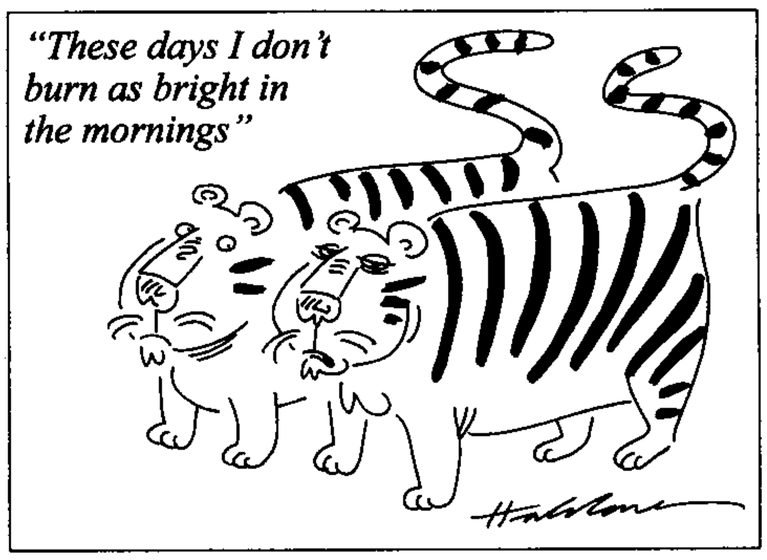
– ● –

●"It's true there is no scientific proof whatsoever that numerology actually works," film producer Vipual Amrutlal Shah admitted to reporters at a studio in Mumbai, "but it is a vital science here in Bollywood. Every studio nowadays employs numerologists to add, subtract, or rearrange the letters in film titles, and in the names of actors, so that they are astrologically sound, because this is a high-risk business with millions of dollars at stake. That's why I support plans for Bollywood to open an official school of numerology to train practitioners, just as we train our directors, actors, and filmmakers."

Numerologist Sanjay B. Jumaani then explained how the science works. "I was recently asked to advise on the title of a film called 'Sing is King,' and told them to add an extra n, so the letters added up to a lucky number. They did so, and 'Sing is Kinng' grossed $15million in its opening week. I also had success by adding an extra r in 'Krrish' and two extra ys in 'Heyy Babyy," so my record speaks for itself. Yet incredibly, there are no schools devoted to numerology, and training currently all depends on personal experience. So you see, it is not madness. My success rate with movies is over 80%, and while my scientific expertise cannot turn a bad film into a box office hit, I can at least guarantee to reduce losses." *(Hindustan Times, 18/9/08. Spotter: Cathal Rabbitte)*

– ● –

● "What this man is doing is absolutely vile," Mike Webster of Napier City Council told reporters in New Zealand, "yet many people think it's funny. Let me tell you right now that it is not funny. For several months, staff at the car park in Municipal Street have been complaining that the coin-operated ticket machine on the second floor is full of urine, so we set up a hidden camera, and now we know why. An unidentified male approaches the machine, undoes his fly, and urinates right up in the air in a big arc, so his urine goes in through the coin slot, and trickles out the hole where people collect their tickets. It's all very well to think this is just a bit of a laugh, but the urine gets deep inside the machine, and stops it operating properly, so some poor soul has the disgusting task of dismantling and cleaning it. We've released the video in the hope that someone can identify the man, and tell us who he is. Given the height of the machine and the length of the arc, he is clearly a man without prostate issues." *(The Dominion Post [New Zealand], 12/8/08. Spotter: S. R. Hare)*



From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Obama makes history

its pc gone mad – ***Prima_Donut***

DC gone mad! ☺ – ***Wee_Billy_Dunn***

McCains had his chip's! lol! – ***Danny_Daz***

O, Bummer! (Only joking guys – a mixed race kid from Stevenage becoming president, the American dream come true!) – ***Bogbrush***

on tv ther was long quew's but at the school there was no quew an no barak box to put vote's in an they said you ca'nt vote in britan? it make's a mockary of democracy? –. ***Hayley_321***

he'iz the ferst africen an american presedent an he got all the afrecen an americen votes "BUT" y r all the vote's from america? i cud'nt see none from africa on the vote map? – ***Yummy_Mummy8***

african's 2 lazy 2 vote! lol! – ***Hunny_pot***

Sadly bigotry is alive and well. A man lost because of the colour of his skin. – ***Cyril_the_cynic***

I read about the vicar in hospital with a potato stuck up his backside. ☺ How long before Barack Obama has to have Mr Potato Head Gordon Brown removed from the same place? – ***Robin***

I'm still sucking the Murray Mints and will continue to do so in support of Andy, Great Britain AND Barack Obama! – ***Murray_Maniac***

Jeremy Clarkson controversy

I was one of the viewers who complained about Clarkson's disgraceful behaviour. I find it extraordinary that a pre-recorded segment could be passed by a succession of BBC professionals without anyone objecting (or even noticing) that he was not wearing a poppy. – ***Silent_Majority***

Jeremy Clarkson = sneering posh boy BBC liberal. Mugging off lorry drivers saying its an easy life, change gear, murder a prostitute, change gear. ● Clarkson you curly muppet let me tell you theres NOTHING easy about driving a truck and slaying a brass. AND I SHOULD KNOW. – ***Yorkie_bar***

Great stuff guys! – ***Bogbrush***

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 31

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

My fellow Americans,

May I be the first, as one of his oldest friends, to congratulate Comrade Senator Obama on his historic election victory which he won by having the wisdom to adopt my motto, "This is the Age of Change".

Indeed, my good friend borrowed all of my policies to achieve his well-deserved triumph over the reactionary ranks of neo-Blairite Bushism. Following my example President Obama has promised to:

- Help the poor and needy bankers in their hour of need, many of them struggling to afford an annual bonus.
- Pull out all the troops from Iraq (except the ones that need to stay there) and bring them all back home to Afghanistan.
- Raise or lower taxes as the economic circumstances dictate.
- Move towards a green agenda so far as it is possible in the prevailing economic circumstances.
- Draw a line under and move on from the failed and discredited former leaders of our two great countries – Bush and Blair – against both of whom I fought tirelessly over many long years as they attempted to destroy the world with their vain neo-imperialist adventurism.

Comrades should know that Senator Obama and I go back a long way – all the way back to 2008 when I flew to Washington to enjoy a historic encounter with the one-day-to-be-President Elect of the Democratic Republic of the United States.

In a wide-ranging meeting of all of five minutes I asked him the question which was at the very top of my agenda – "Can we have our photograph taken together?" I shall never forget his reply, "Yes, we can!" And I realised that was the moment that he realised that he had discovered the slogan that would carry him to the White House.

Many comrades will therefore have been shocked to hear the pathetic claims of the leader of the reactionary neo-Govist Bullingdonian claque, David Cameron, who said that Comrade President Elect Obama was *his* friend rather than mine. I have never heard such a grotesque misrepresentation of the facts. For the record, let me state that the running dog lickspittle Cameron only met Obama once for less than five minutes and all he did in that time was to ask him to pose for a joint photograph – which he clearly intended to use for cheap propaganda purposes.

Signed

Gordon Brown

The Supreme Leader

BIG SISTER IS WATCHING YOU!

Comrade Smith, Security Commissar, writes:

All comrades are hereby advised that in the pursuit of the ongoing war against terrorism the following new measures are to be introduced immediately.

1. Biometric identity cards are to be issued to all airport workers and those involved in sensitive Baggage Losing Operations. Workers will be required to undergo fingerprinting, iris-identification and saliva testing to be outsourced to the independent and highly experienced firm of Crapita-EDS-NBG (Tasmania).

After the successful trial of the ID cards in an airport situation their application will be extended to all workers in other economic sectors where security is a priority, e.g. bee keeping, strawberry picking, lollipop safety supervision, clock mending and wall-to-wall carpeting.

The government will be holding a wide-ranging consultation exercise with stakeholders in all of the above groups prior to rolling out a compulsory ID scheme for all citizens in all occupations at all times.

2. Using our recently acquired anti-terrorist powers we shall be installing electronic chips and web cameras in all refuse disposal containers (RDCs) in order to monitor incorrect classification of refuse, e.g. putting old copy of Spectator in plastic recycling bin or failure to observe Time Requirements For the Placing of Waste Receptacles on Pavement, e.g. mistaking an alternate Thursday for a weekly Monday.

There will be automatic fixed penalties of £1,000 or six months in prison.

3. There will be 25 new Titanic prisons built to accommodate the increased number of waste disposal terrorists caught in breach of the above.

Remember: we know everything there is to know about you.*

*Or we did until an irresponsible comrade left his laptop in the toilet of the 8.28 from Oxshott to Waterloo.

■ Congratulations to the Supreme Leader and especially to the Supreme Leader's wife for their historic democratic election victory in Glenrothes. The People's Party were once again triumphant, thanks to Comrade Mrs Brown's heroic efforts knocking on 70,000 doors and personally distributing 127,000,000 leaflets. From now on, she is to be known as The Supreme Canvasser and will be given the Grand Cross of the Order of Gordon (1st Class). As Comrade Brown said, unlike his opponents, he will never stoop to using *his* family for political purposes. PM

A Guardian Special

The Birth Of The Messiah

by **Matthew, Mark, Luke and Jonathan Freedland**

AND LO it came to pass that an Angel of the Lord appeared on CNN and said, "Fear not for I bring you breaking tidings of great joy – for this day in the city of Washington a Messiah has come, and his name shall be Obama, which is to say 'the Chosen One, the Saviour, the Bringer of Change'."

And there were hacks sleeping it off in the fields and they saw the light and said one to another, "Truly this man is the Son of God. Let us go and worship Obama."

And the hacks went and anointed Obama, writing hundreds of pieces about him saying, "Verily, he is a dream cometh true."

And shortly it came to pass that the people cried out for miracles, saying, "Surely Superman has come amongst us. Why can he not fix the US economy, bring about global peace and feed us all with 5,000 quarter-pound cheeseburgers, shakes and fries?"

And Obama said unto them, "Blessed are the Peace-makers, for they shall be redeployed from Iraq to take part in a new surge in Afghanistan."

And the people said amongst themselves, "Hang on, this doesn't seem all that different to that which goeth on before even under Dubya, the Burning Bush." *(Cont. Chapter 94.)*

You Name The Obama Puppy

Choose from the following:

- Pluto
- Dubya
- Hillary
- Sarko
- Oprah
- Gordon
- Beyonce
- Peaches
- Stephen Fry

"This place has changed since all these ex-City high-flyers started coming here"

GORDON BROWN

An Apology

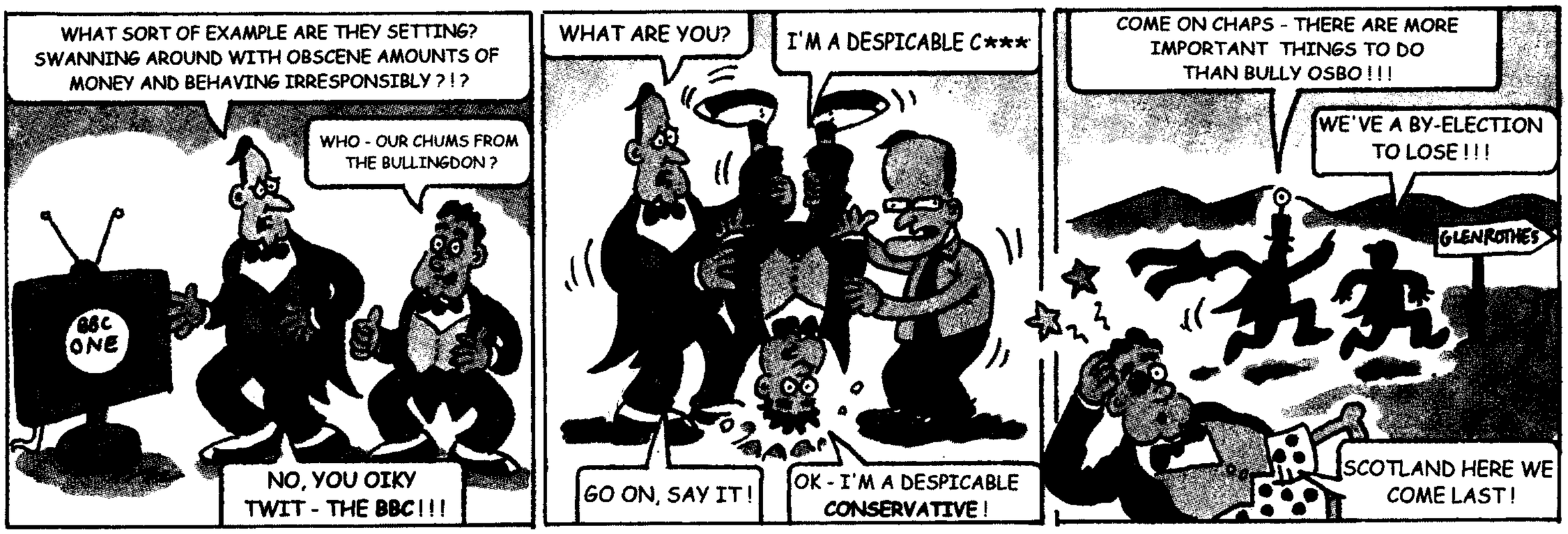
IN COMMON with all other newspapers we may have given the impression that we regarded Mr Gordon Brown as the most disastrous Prime Minister ever to hold office in this country. Headlines such as 'Gormless Gordon – Time To Pack It In!', 'Gord Awful – He's Going Brown The Drain', and 'The Most Disastrous Prime Minister Ever to Hold Office In This Country' may have led our readers to conclude that we had a low estimate of Mr Brown's capabilities.

We now recognise that there is not a jot or scintilla of truth whatsoever in the above. Mr Brown is, on the contrary, a world statesman of undoubted stature, a financial genius who has single-handedly rescued the British and, indeed, the world economy from certain disaster and more than a match for the pathetic discredited Tory wannabee Mr David Cameron – as our recent headlines have made clear, eg. 'Flash Gordon To The Rescue', 'Goliath Gordon Slays Dumbo David' and 'The Camerons Are Going Not Coming' *(Scottish Edition only)*.

We would like to apologise unreservedly to Mr Brown for any confusion caused by our earlier reports.

© *All newspapers*

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


WHAT SORT OF EXAMPLE ARE THEY SETTING? SWANNING AROUND WITH OBSCENE AMOUNTS OF MONEY AND BEHAVING IRRESPONSIBLY ? ! ?
WHO - OUR CHUMS FROM THE BULLINGDON ?
BBC ONE
NO, YOU OIKY TWIT - THE BBC ! ! !
WHAT ARE YOU?
I'M A DESPICABLE C***
GO ON, SAY IT !
OK - I'M A DESPICABLE CONSERVATIVE !
COME ON CHAPS - THERE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO THAN BULLY OSBO ! ! !
WE'VE A BY-ELECTION TO LOSE ! ! !
GLENROTHES
SCOTLAND HERE WE COME LAST !

ROMANTIC SHORT STORY SPECIAL

'Life Begins At...'

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, best-selling author of *Heir Of Sorrows*

THE STORY SO FAR: Charles is 60 and Camilla has prepared a surprise party at Highgrove.

Now read on...

THE SOUND of champagne corks popping mingled with the excited laughter of the guests, as Charles looked on delightedly at the glittering array of celebrities cavorting before him on the dance floor to the sound of Bonzo Bilk and his Billericay Banjo Band.

"Ying Tong Ying Tong Ying Tong Tiddle Eye Po," Charles hummed along merrily to himself.

"They don't write songs like that any more, do they, darling?" he beamed at Camilla as they foxtrotted around the floor.

And who was this they had just brushed up against? Sir Stephen Fry dancing with the newly ennobled Lord Mandelson. And wasn't that the Indian chap from the Kumars, jitterbugging with Lady Euphorbia Lycett-Green? And was that Eddie Fox stepping lightly on Dame Jilly Cooper's toes? Had he ever been happier? His nearest and dearest all celebrating this historic day together.

His thoughts were interrupted momentarily by the roar of a Chinook helicopter landing in the Islamic Garden.

"That must be Wills and Harry," he cried excitedly. "They remembered!" And indeed they had. The two young princes in fancy dress as members of the Wehrmacht stumbled onto the dance floor, along with their friends Pongo Fforbes-Frobisher, Charlie Ricketson-Smythe, Fruitella Chelsea-Tractor, Pussina Wellington-Bosanquet and a number of people they had met in Boozo's Nightclub in Kensington shortly before.

"What ho, Pater! Great thrash! Where's the booze?" shouted the second-in-line to the throne.

Charles smiled paternally. "There's some organic elderflower cordial in the marquee, I think. Sir Alan knows where it is."

"Ha, ha, ha, jokes," laughed the young people, as they staggered towards the Champagne Bar where Sir Alan Fitztightly was dispensing flutes of Duchy Original Poundbury Champagne-style Drink to Sir Ben Elton and Sir Rowan Atkinson, amongst others.

But then Camilla was clapping her hands and calling for silence.

"Good evening, everybody, and thank you so much for coming all this way. And now for tonight's big surprise."

For a second, the thought flashed through Charles' mind. Was Mater abdicating? Did Camilla know something he didn't? It would be quite a birthday present.

But no. The grey-bearded drummer of the Billericay Banjo Band, the legendary Ronnie Gibbons, performed a roll on the drums and Camilla continued, "Please welcome our special guest, the one and only er... Rob Stewart, is it?"

And into the spotlight strode the tousled and tanned popmeister, the man of a hundred hits and a thousand conquests, dressed in leopard-skin trousers with a guitar strung around his neck.

"Yeah. Happy Birthday, Yer Highness. This one's for you," drawled Rod Stewart in his familiar husky voice.

And then he launched into his most famous chartbuster, as the guests swayed and sang along. "Do ya think I'm Sixty," they all chanted raucously...

"WHAT A great party! He really is incredible for his age, isn't he?"

Charles' ears pricked up, as he stood in the queue for the buffet serving vegetarian Lobster Thermidor with Free-Trade Hand-Reared Swan, and could not help himself overhearing a conversation between two of his younger guests standing in front of him, Lady Araminta "Minty" Starborgling and her friend Tara Rara-Boomdeeay.

"He's like *so* not past it. you'd never know he was that old. He's like really fit still," observed Minty.

Charles felt a warm glow rising from the pit of his stomach.

Young people were often misjudged, he felt. They were actually very perceptive and really saw things the way they were.

"A lot of people say like he's finished and that," added Tara, "but I say he's still sexy and he's like sort of good for years and years."

How true that was, Charles told himself, and how heartening at a time when the ghastly chaps in the press were so relentlessly negative and so unnecessarily critical. Here was the authentic voice of tomorrow.

"He's had a hard life, right, and his first wife was a nightmare..." continued Lady Araminta.

Charles nodded silently as he helped himself to a vegan poppadum with grilled kiwi fruit and baked beansprout sauce.

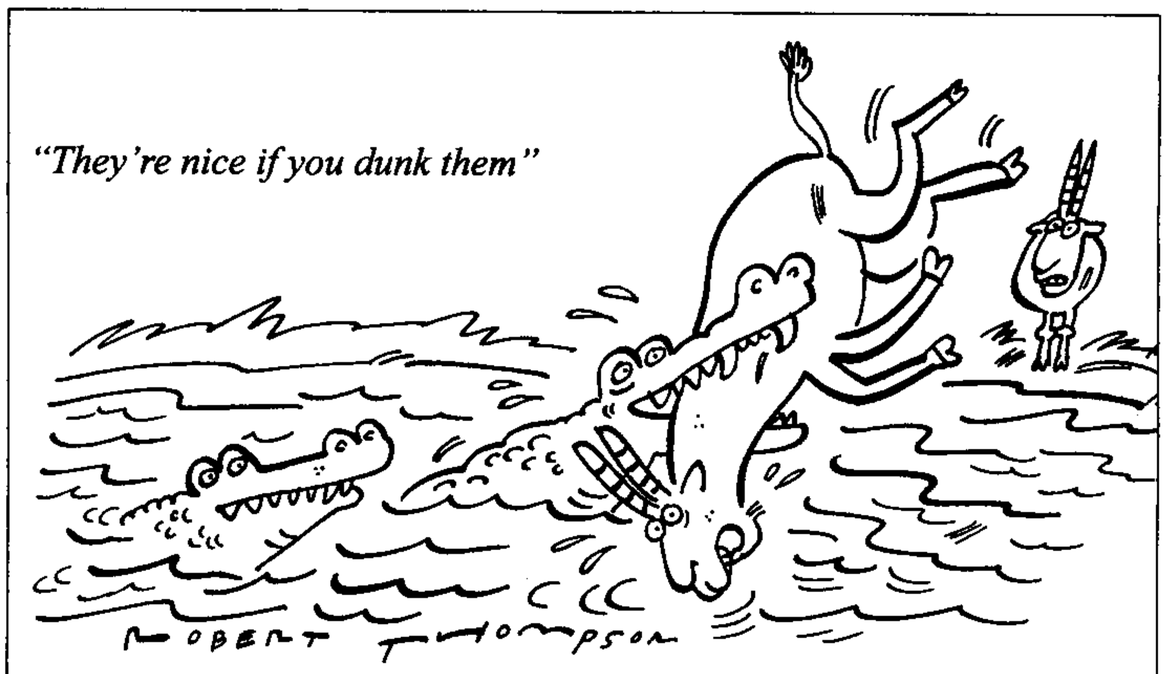
Minty then turned to Charles, "Don't you agree, sir? I mean, Rod Stewart's amazing, isn't he?"

"Er... er... Yes, I suppose he is," Charles stammered dejectedly.

He looked down at his plate and felt his appetite rapidly dwindle away. The Billericay Banjo Band struck up once again with *I'm Walking Backwards To Christmas*.

(To be continued...)

"They're nice if you dunk them"



WHAT YOU MISSED
THE ELECTION NIGHT THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

CHANNEL FOUR

★ *(Long shot of man standing on his own in front of the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia)*

Jon Snow *(for it is he)*: This is where it all began and tonight history is being made again in the most historic election in American history. Millions of Americans have been queueing for months, standing patiently "in line" to play their part in the election they are already calling the most historic...

(Elderly black man walks past and looks into camera)

Snow: Could I ask you, sir, whether you voted in this historic election?

Man *(Ephraim B. Nutter, Mayor of Philadelphia, for it is he)*: Yessir.

Snow: And may I ask you how you voted?

Man: I voted Obama.

Snow: Well, there you have it. One of the first results in. Of course, it's far too early to read too much into the vote of one elderly man in Philadelphia and of course McCain could yet win even though the polls are showing Obama ahead in some of the swing states by as much as 28%...

RADIO 4

Jim Naughtie: Here is where it all began in the historic city of Chicago all those long months ago at the start of what they are calling the most historic election campaign the world has ever known. At this early stage of the proceedings, it is of course too soon to predict what the outcome will be – even though we can be pretty sure that it will be historic. I've been speaking to Republican organiser Dwight D. Krauthammer. Mr Krauthammer, we all know that, in this historic election, we can't rely on the exit polls because so many people have voted early, but even allowing for that, if we look at one of the key swing states, such as North Wyoming, the polls are showing that the white blue collar vote which as been solidly Republican since Eisenhower won in 1956 has now shifted an extraordinary 3% towards Obama, whereas... oh dear... Mr Krauthammer seems to have left us and gone home before I could finish my question...

BBC

David Dimbleby: Well, here in New York, you can cut the tension with a knife. This historic election could still go either way...

(Subtitles read "CNN declare Obama Way Ahead – McCain About To Concede")

Dimbleby: In a moment I'll be interviewing all the other BBC correspondents to see how they view this historic day, but first over to Phil Screen in West Carolina for some of the reaction on the ground to tonight's historic events.

(Shot of Phil Screen standing by ancient cannon in agreeable park)

Screen: This is where it all began, where the first shots were fired in the American Civil War – and tonight that War has at last come to an end – though, of course, it's too early to predict the result.

(Man walks past with newspaper headline reading "Obama Wins")

Screen: Excuse me, sir. I am from the BBC and I have been told to find an African-American person and ask them whether they ever thought they would live to see this day.

Extremely Elderly African American Person: I thought I would never live to see this day.

Screen: Thank you. So there we have one typical African-American who never thought he would live to see this day.

Extremely Elderly African American Person: God bless you. And God bless America.

Screen: And before you leave us, sir, could you just squeeze out a tear to show how moved you are to see this historic day that you thought you would never live to see...

(Screen produces standard issue BBC onion and starts weeping copiously himself)

ITV

Alistair Stewart: And on a potentially memorable night in America's political and, indeed, cultural history, I am delighted to say that we're joined here in the studio by one of the world's top political analysts... Sooty. What was that, Sooty? If Obama doesn't win, you're going to squirt somebody with your water pistol? Okay, join us after the break...

BBC AGAIN

Dimblebore: We're going over now to the University of New Dworkin to talk to Professor Wallace J. Landesman, who is the Pipesucker Professor of American Political History.

Landesman: Good evening.

Dimblebore: Professor, as a professor of history, would you say that on this historic night we are looking at one of the most historic elections in American history, if not the most historic election ever. I mean, are we literally watching history being made?

Landesman: Well, of course, we have to remember the surprise defeat of Hiram P. Hucklebuck when he lost to President Wilbur Homer in 1882, the so-called Pig's Knuckle Election, but even that must pale into insignificance if McCain wins tonight as the polls are indicating...

Dimblebore: Thank you, Professor. *(Snatches half empty bottle of Old Satchmo's 180° Maltsquash Bourbon from Landesman's shaking hand)*

Dimblebore: And now it's time for all you viewers back in Britain to go to bed whilst we here drone on for four hours in an attempt to fill up the time before we actually get some results...

BBC YET AGAIN

Dimblebore: ...and welcome back to our historic cliffhanger Election Night Special here in the USA and let's look at the papers. *(Holds up provincial papers)*

The Wyoming Sentinel headline, *"Obama Wins "*. The Fort Lauderdale Gazette has *"It's Obama By A Mile"*. And this one, the Alaska Evening Moose, says it all. A smiling picture of President Elect Obama with the headline *"Bad Moose For Sarah Palin!"*.

Every indication there that Senator McCain could be on course for a surprise victory. So, over to Chicago where 20 million Americans have gathered to hear President Elect Obama's victory speech. (Pause) No. They've all gone home. Back to Jeremy Vine in London.

Vine: Thanks, David. Just a chance before we go to have a look at our own British newspapers which, of course, went to press before the results came out. The Guardian leads with *"We wish we could vote for Obama"*, The Daily Mail runs with *"Could Obama Victory Cause Collapse In House Prices?"* and the Independent chooses *"Is Your Dog Having A Happy Sex Life?"*.

(Cont. for 94 hours)

"We were only pushing the boundaries, Your Honour. It is part of our cultural remit"

The Sun Says

CLARKSON JOKE 'NOT OFFENSIVE'

THE *SUN* is astonished by the so-called outrage over a light-hearted and good-natured gag made by Jeremy Clarkson on *Top Gear* about truck drivers murdering prostitutes.

There is no way that this light-hearted banter can be compared to the highly offensive jokes made by Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand about Andrew Sachs's granddaughter.

The reason that Jeremy Clarkson's comments were not offensive is very simple – and that's because he earns a tidy six-figure sum writing a weekly column for the *Sun*. And, for that reason alone, we applaud Jeremy Clarkson and say he should continue to tickle the nation with his hilarious quips about how all truckers are murderous lunatics.

Who knows, perhaps he's got a joke about Andrew Sachs's granddaughter too. If so, we can't wait to hear it. Jeremy's just the '*Man-uel*' for the job!

GLENDA SLAGG

EXCLUSIVE!

She's the gal leading the backlash against the backlash!!?

■ LIGHTEN UP Manuel!?! *Que?!?* Andrew Sachs I'm talkin' about stoopid!?! What's the matter, Grandad? Can't you take a joke?!? Wossy and Wussy were just a pair of pranksters havin' a little laugh!?!! And you've turned it into a Third World War!?! Get a life – or what's left of it!?! Geddit?! There's only one thing Fawlty around here and that's *your* sense of humour!?! It's *you* who should have got the Sachs – not Russell!?!

■ MANUEL'S granddaughter!?! What a slapper!?! She deserves everything she got!!? Miss Innocent!?! Don't make me laugh!?! "Burlesque Entertainer"? Oh yeah! Come off it, darlin', and don't tell me you didn't enjoy your night of nookie with Randy Romeo Russell!?! Mmmmm!?! There's plenty of us gals who would happily have swapped places with you!??! It was only a phone call to your Granddad, luv, not the Third World War!?!

■ WHAT'S the matter with everyone?!? Have we all turned into prudes and killjoys overnight?!? I thought we got rid of Mrs Whitehouse and her ilk years ago!?! This country has always enjoyed raunchy humour – Chaucer, Shakespeare and now Risqué Russell and his own *Brand* of cutting edge, boundary-breaking abusive phone calls!?! So don't go, Russy and Rossy – in these dark times of recession we need you more than ever to keep us laughin' by ringing up old blokes and giving them grief about their granddaughter!?!

■ HATS OFF to Ross and Russ!?! The Dirty Duo who have put Britain on top of the world – when it comes to dirty messages on pensioners' answerphones, these two comedy giants have made us hold our heads high!?! *(That's enough Backlash. Ed.)*

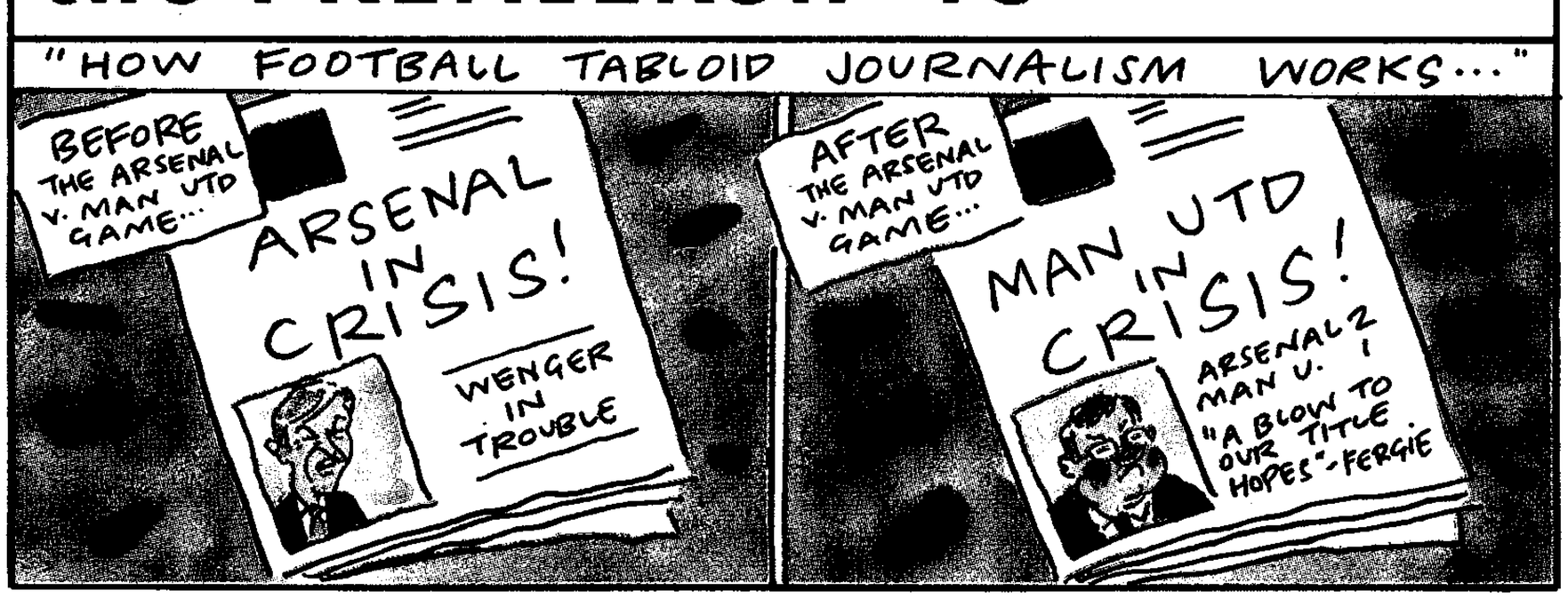
Byeee!!

"As a stand-up comic, I feel that I'm a lightning conductor for society...

... I say the unsayable, I'm transgressive, for me there are no taboos...

... Criticise Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand?! Me? You're joking!"

the PREMIERSH*TS


"HOW FOOTBALL TABLOID JOURNALISM WORKS..."
BEFORE THE ARSENAL V. MAN UTD GAME...
ARSENAL IN CRISIS!
WENGER IN TROUBLE
AFTER THE ARSENAL V. MAN UTD GAME...
MAN UTD IN CRISIS!
ARSENAL 2 MAN U. 1
"A BLOW TO OUR TITLE HOPES"-FERGIE

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

JONATHAN ROSS

Do you have a favourite spoon?

Yes. Look at this one. What does it remind you of? That's right. A bloke's knob. A great big pork sausage looking for some stuffing! Though it's not as big as mine. Let me show you! Come on, darling, you're gagging for it, aren't you? I'll give you a good spooning...

(Unfortunately, due to a number of complaints from our readers, we have decided to suspend this column for three months. However, we must stress that we reserve our right as a public service magazine to publish cutting-edge spoon interviews that push back the boundaries of acceptable cutlery feature pieces at some future date. The Board of Private Eye Trustees. 2008.*)*

REMEMBRANCE SATURDAY

by Our Broadcasting Correspondent **Poppy Day**

AN EERIE silence descended over the country at precisely 11 o'clock. As Big Ben chimed, the nation paused and heard the solemn announcement from the BBC.

"We would like to apologise unreservedly to the nation for Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand."

For a few brief moments the nation was united in delight and there was many a tear of joy amongst the listening crowds.

Said one veteran of over 90 BBC apologies, "On page 3 of the Sun and on *Good Morning*, they will be forgotten."

Advertisement

BBC GRANDCHILDREN IN NEED

FRIDAY 14TH NOVEMBER

IT'S BACK! The BBC's annual fundraising event which aims at making a real difference to the bank balances of the granddaughters of former sitcom stars by broadcasting offensive messages left on their answerphones.

Once again JONATHAN ROSS and RUSSELL BRAND will be your hosts for the night, a glittering charity event which promises laughter, surprises and even the odd resignation or two.

Just a single phone call from Ross and Brand recently raised a tidy six-figure sum for Georgina Baillie from the Sun.

'It would have taken me twenty years to earn this sort of cash doing burlesque and erotic cabaret. Thanks BBC Grandchildren in Need! – ***Georgina, London***'

So, please keep the phone lines busy and give generously*

*All offensive calls to 'BBC Grandchildren in Need' will be recorded for broadcast on Jonathan Ross's Radio 2 show when he returns to air in February.

"I'm sorry Mr Escher but yes, you will have to fit disabled access"

Your Guide To The 50 Most Highly Paid BBC Executives

Philippa Dunwoody	Head of Regional Paperclips **£453,000 pa**
A.P.R. Rushworth	Head of Creative Filing (Cabinets) **£716,000 pa**
Melanie Shipthorpe	Deputy Head Compliance, Human Resources & Post-It Notes (*Wales*) **£374,000 pa**
Maurice Wanstead	Senior Supervisor (Drawing Pins) Vision Directorate (*North East*) **£932,402 pa**
Sonali Sudoku	Head of Diversity, Gender & Mouse Mats (*Ulster*) **£742,312 pa**
Keith Bargleby	Head of Virtual Marketing & Digital Promotions Unit (*Bristol*) **£1,748,437 pa**

(That's enough, Ed)

Jamie Oliver's Ministry Of Swearing

Recipe Sheet No. 94

To Start
Fuck Soup

– ❋ –

Main
Spaghetti Bollocknaise

– ❋ –

Sweet
Bread & Bugger Pudding

– ❋ –

To Finish
Crappuccino

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Michael Crichton, Best-Selling Science Fiction Author

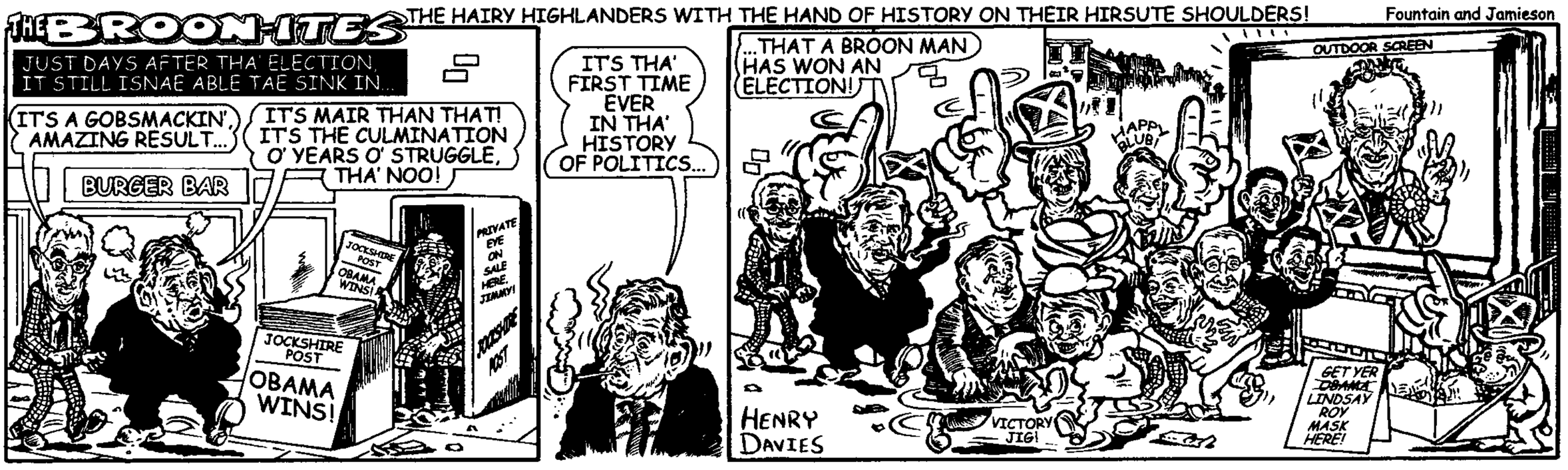
So. Farewell
Then Michael
Crichton.

Creator of
Jurassic Park,
In which dinosaurs
Were brought
Back to life.

In a million
Years' time
Will you be
Brought back
In similar
Fashion?

This is not
A question a
Poet can
Easily answer.

E.J. Thribb (17½ million years old)


THE BROON-ITES
THE HAIRY HIGHLANDERS WITH THE HAND OF HISTORY ON THEIR HIRSUTE SHOULDERS!
Fountain and Jamieson
JUST DAYS AFTER THA' ELECTION, IT STILL ISNAE ABLE TAE SINK IN...
IT'S A GOBSMACKIN', AMAZING RESULT...
IT'S MAIR THAN THAT! IT'S THE CULMINATION O' YEARS O' STRUGGLE, THA' NOO!
BURGER BAR
JOCKSHIRE POST
OBAMA WINS!
PRIVATE EYE ON SALE HERE, JIMMY!
IT'S THA' FIRST TIME EVER IN THA' HISTORY OF POLITICS...
...THAT A BROON MAN HAS WON AN ELECTION!
OUTDOOR SCREEN
HAPPY BLUB!
VICTORY JIG!
GET YER OBAMA LINDSAY ROY MASK HERE!
HENRY DAVIES

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2008

DRINK WINE OR DON'T – Warning to Pregnant Women

By Our Health Staff
Phillipa Glass

LAST night pregnant women were being advised either to drink wine or not if they wanted their child to be healthy or sick.

Said a government spokesman, "The scientific facts are clear. If you are pregnant, you should not drink any wine at all unless you do, in which case it is OK."

He continued, "I can't stress this enough. The risk of drinking wine when pregnant is only outweighed by the risk of not drinking wine. And vice versa.

"It's absolutely plain," he concluded, "we have no idea what we are on about."

On Other Pages

- Are conflicting messages bad for your health? **2**
- Should pregnant women read the Daily Mail? **3**
- Unfunny wine-related cartoon by Hic **94**

CONGO – MILIBAND FLIES IN

by Our Man in the Congo
Joseph Conrad Black

BRITAIN'S foreign secretary David Miliband flew into the Congo today to issue his toughest message yet to the warring factions in this troubled nation who are threatening to plunge the Congo into a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions.

Speaking to a local journalist in a shack just outside the airport, Miliband warned: "If you don't stop this fighting straight away, I shall get jolly cross. And I will come back here in a month's time and warn you all over again."

A delegation of smiling warlords then presented Mr Miliband with a crate of locally grown bananas and thanked him for taking such an active interest in the affairs of their country.

When asked whether Britain would be sending troops to impose peace on this war-torn land Mr Miliband said, "I would be delighted, but sadly our soldiers are all busy being killed in Afghanistan."

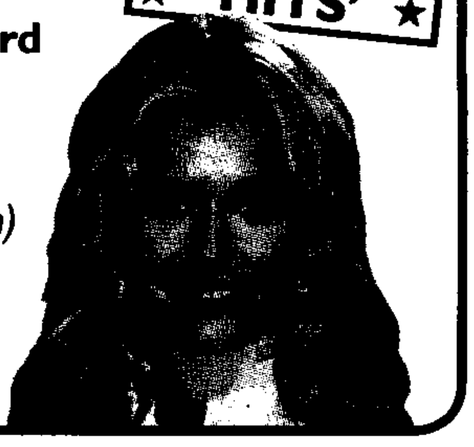
Advertisement

New This Christmas

KATHERINE JENKINS

★ THE GREATEST 'HITS' ★

- Ave Marijuana
- **Abide With E**
- Turandope *(Medley)*
- **The Drug Lord Is My Shepherd**
- Viva La Deala
- **Amazing Disgrace**
- Mozart's Magic Toot *(Selection)*
- **Land of Dope and Glory**
- The Hokey-Cokey *(Surely some mistake?)*



THOSE TEN POLICE PLEDGES IN FULL

***1** If you ring 999 we pledge that your call may be monitored for training purposes.*

***2** When ringing 999 you should press 1 for physical assault, 2 for rape, 3 to pay a parking fine, 4 to hear the options again. We pledge to answer ALL your calls within two working days.*

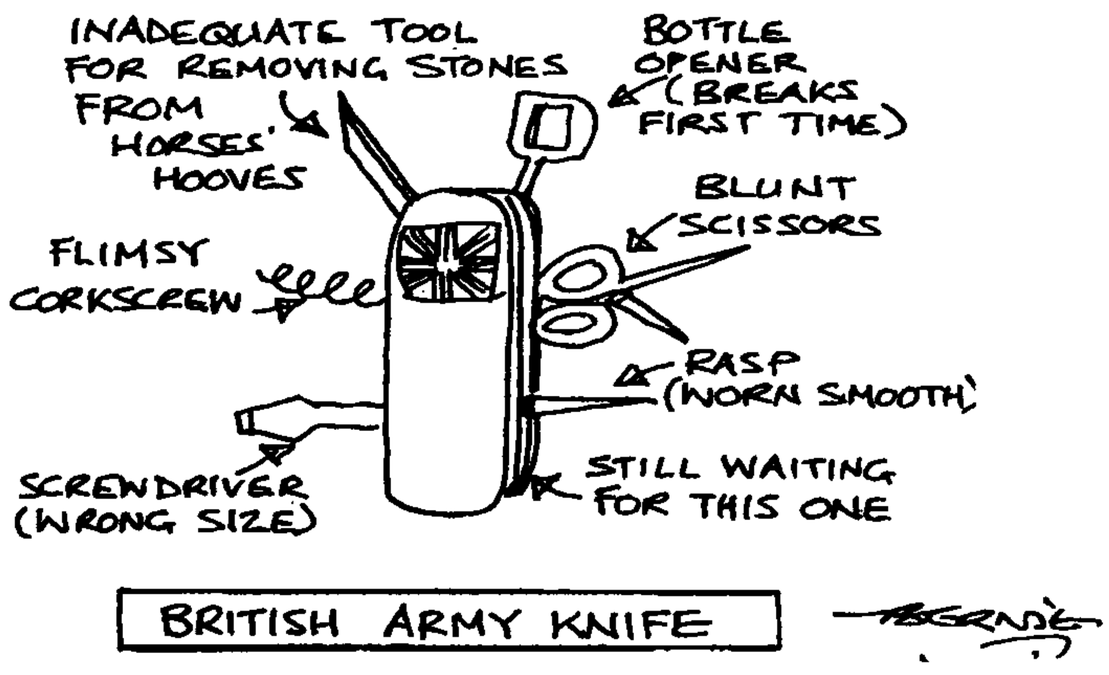
***3** If you have been the victim of a serious crime such as burglary and are upset about it, we pledge to send round a counsellor to talk through your traumatic experience (subject to availability).*

***4** If you have been the victim of a serious crime such as burglary and are NOT upset about it, we pledge to arrange a visit from a community support officer to talk through your lack of trauma at a time suitable to you (11.30am Thursday morning).*

***5** We pledge to make a number of further pledges involving the words community, neighbourhood, social fabric, grapefruit segments, etc.*

***6** If you are a Brazilian electrician innocently boarding an underground train we pledge to fire at least 15 bullets into your head without warning and then tell a lot of lies at the inquest.*

***7** If you are Sir Ian Blair, we pledge to pay you £400,000 for being fired.*
(That's enough pledges. Ed)



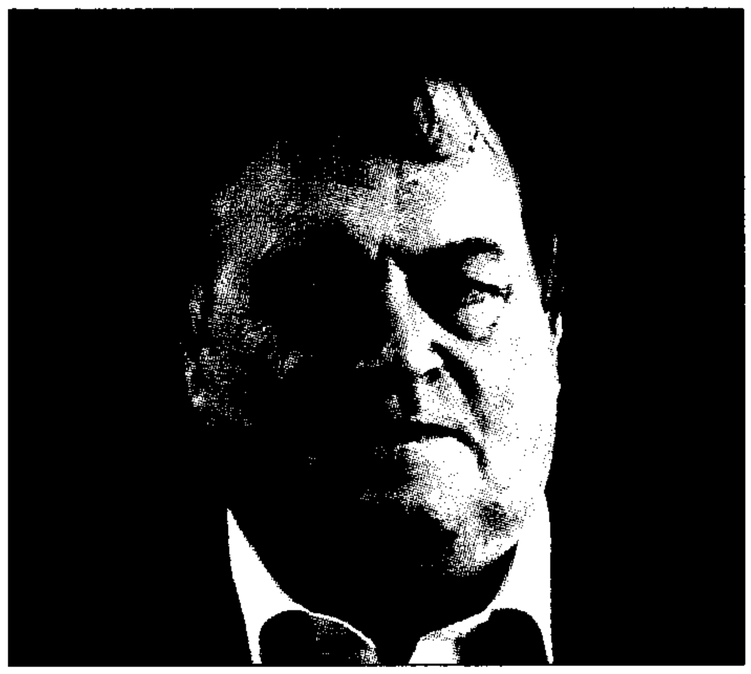
Alan Bennett Donates Literary Archive To The Bodleian Library

That Bequest In Full (annotated by the Author)

- **One tupperware box** – containing uneaten egg and cress sandwiches.
- **Half packet chocolate Hobnobs** – consumed by members of cast of "The Madness of Boy George" during rehearsal.
- **One pair bicycle clips** – originally purchased from gentlemen's outfitters Pevsner and Snelgrove in Halifax, now a hairdressers and nail bar with the unfortunate name of "Snips 'n' Clips". (The letters "a" and "d", I notice, having sadly been snipped and clipped from the word "and").
- **One letter to Thora Hird** – enquiring if she would mind playing the part of Mrs Hoover, an old lady who takes the No. 42 bus to visit her niece, who works behind the perfume counter at Boots in Giggleswick.
- **A "Good Luck" card to Dame Maggie Smith** – from the author when she took over the role of Mrs Hoover in "Forty Plays On" at the Gielgud in Shaftesbury Avenue. Bears the message, *"Wish You Were Hird"*, not a bad joke given the unfortunate circumstances.
- **An Order of Service from Evensong from the Church of St Melvyn in Bragg, Cumbria** – A note in pencil on the sheet by the author enquires whether or not the vicar, who has a prominent moustache, might indeed "bat and bowl for the same side".

(That's enough archive. Ed.)

DIARY



THE RT HON JOHN PRESCOTT MP PC ON CLASS

So I'm sat here at home and the Queen's sat wherever she's sat, how would I know where's she's sat she doesn't tell me these things for one reason and one reason alone because I'm not her class am I, I'm not one of the priliveged few and so what I want to know is why she's sat where she's sat and why I'm sat where I'm sat, and why she's not invited me to sit where she's sat, because one thing's for sure wherever she's sat is a lot more comfortable than where I'm sat because she's had all the advantages and she can afford a better chair, costlier cushions, toffee-nosed carpet, the lot.

I've come here to hoity-toity Royal Ascot, don't hog the sausage rolls, love, to see how the other half live. I'm with one of their horses in the snooty paddock, very nice if you can afford it, and at these prices there's not many who can, and what I want to ask this horse is what class it thinks it belongs to – upper, middle or working?

At the moment, it's refusivating to speak to me. Typical. These over-privileged horses won't speak to a bloke they considers below them. And now it's just standing there on four legs while the rest of us have to make do with just the two, and it's chewing on a raw carrot. That's what they all eat – raw carrot, ooh, very posh, very fashionable – while the rest of us have to make do with pie and chips. Did someone mention meat pie? Ooh, I could murder a meat pie, I love me meat pie, don't stint on the chips.

These snooty upper class horses, you can just feel them looking down their noses at you, thinking to themselves, what's HE doing here, he didn't go to a private school like what we did where they play polo and sing opera and hang around all day in their tail-coats and their powdered wigs, oh, no, he's definitely working-class, and I'll tell you another thing, I've seen these horses glancing from one to the other, I know their sort, and they're muttervating to each other under their breaths, they're saying, all snobby, "I say, Algernon, old fellow, who on EARTH let HIM into our naice upper-class horse-box?" and it makes me sick.

So here I am in my own house, bought with my own hard-earned money, thank you very much, so don't tell me I didn't or I'll bloody thump you for being so aggressive, and I'm standing down here at the bottom of the stairs looking up and I'm sorry it may sound stupid but I've always had this feeling when looking upstairs that there's going to be someone on a higher step looking back down at me, that's why I've always preferred to travel in lifts, or "elevators", as the up-their-own-arses brigade call them, because at least when you're all stood in a lift you know everyone else is on the same level and there's no one above you looking down on you thinking bloody hell he's inferior. Y'know, sometimes I've travelled in a lift with lah-di-dah big-wigs all posh and that and even though I've been dressed up in a suit and tie I've known in my gut they're all busy thinking I'm the bloody lift-operator and thinking to themselves, why don't that inferior lower-class man stop giving himself airs and start pressing the buttons like we employ him to do and that kind of attitude really gets to me, it really does I want to give them a good thumping and tell them look, chum, I've got as much right as you to travel in this lift and if you want to go to a particularised floor then why not just punch the buttons for your own bloody self?

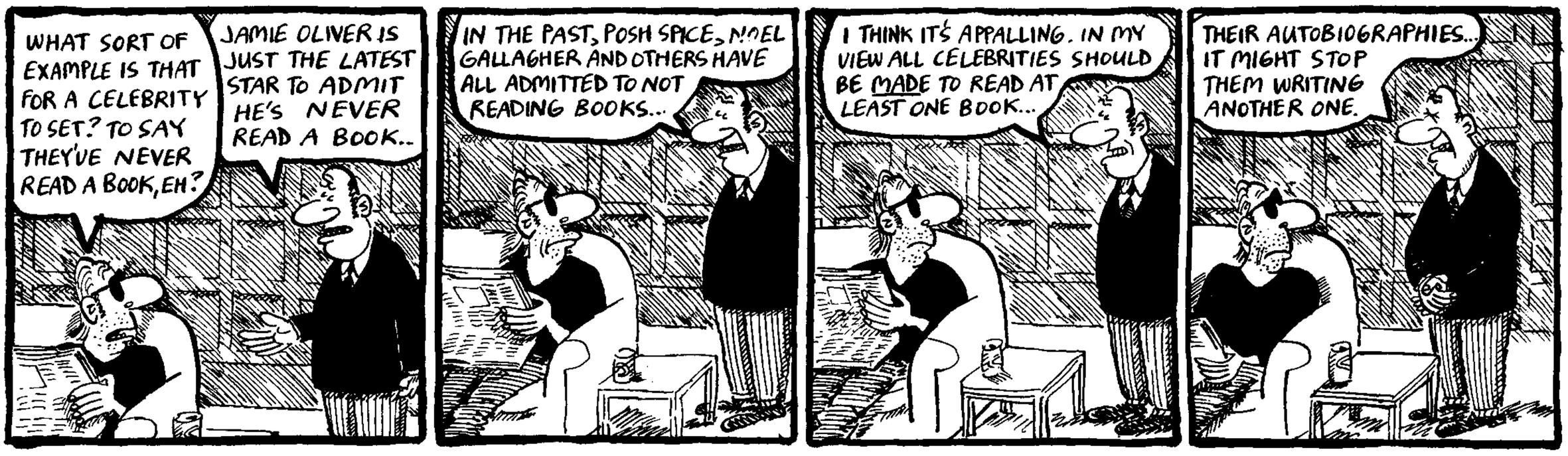
Cherie Blair don't talk to me about Cherie Blair the way she treated me when I'd come into Number 10 Downing she acted as though she owned the place, all "John, why don't you sit yourself there" and "John, what can I get you to drink?" and questions like that, all patronising, trying to put me down all the time, telling me to get back in my box and leave the running of the country to posh stuck-ups with their snooty 11-pluses like her and her type.

I once went to Downing Street for a formal do and I'll never forget Cherie coming up to me with a tray full of sandwiches, and that look on her face which said, "I got my 11-plus but you never got yours" and her saying to me, and I'll never forget the exact words, she said, "John, you look as though you could do with a nice smoked salmon sandwich?!"

The cheek of it. I've never been treated like that in all my born days, I were seething, I mean, offering me smoked salmon – when the bloody woman knew full well that I came from a working-class background and when you come from a working-class background like mine, well, eating smoked salmon really means something pretty terrible, and for her to taunt me with the offer of what she called a "NICE smoked salmon sandwich" well, that really got on my goat don't tell me she didn't know what she was doing she wanted me to reach out and grab one of her bloody smoked salmon sandwiches and shove it down my gob so that she could go back to her airy-fairy namby-pamby public school friends with their smarmy faces and laugh at me behind my back and say "Oooh, girls giggle giggle giggle guess what I spotted John Prescott stuffing himself with a smoked salmon sandwich just now yet he calls himself lower class, don't ye'know, haw haw haw!" and that's the kind of disgraceful behaviour by the privileged upper classes that's spurred me to fight for the disadvantagibles in our society like myself.

So when I went with Pauline to Buckingham Palace for lunch with the Queen, the Queen looks down her nose at me like I was something the cat brought in and she says to me have you come far and I says to her, what the hell do you mean by that, yes, I have actually, I've come very bloody far, don't interrupt, I was born into a solid working class background and unlike you and your snooty friends I was educated at a state school and I'm proud of my originations and I don't like being patronisingated by the likes of you and your toffee-nosed clique of aristocats and if I had my way I'd convert your so-called Palace into flats for the less fortunate and take the main one for myself thank you very much. And then I look at her corgi and the corgi looks back at me and it doesn't have to say anything because I knew what it were thinking, it were thinking, "I'm not letting that inferior working class man take any of my Meaty Chunks" and I'm thinking to myself, well, if that's what you think then you've got another think coming, matey.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


WHAT SORT OF EXAMPLE IS THAT FOR A CELEBRITY TO SET? TO SAY THEY'VE NEVER READ A BOOK, EH?
JAMIE OLIVER IS JUST THE LATEST STAR TO ADMIT HE'S NEVER READ A BOOK..
IN THE PAST, POSH SPICE, NOEL GALLAGHER AND OTHERS HAVE ALL ADMITTED TO NOT READING BOOKS...
I THINK IT'S APPALLING. IN MY VIEW ALL CELEBRITIES SHOULD BE MADE TO READ AT LEAST ONE BOOK...
THEIR AUTOBIOGRAPHIES... IT MIGHT STOP THEM WRITING ANOTHER ONE.

Literary Review

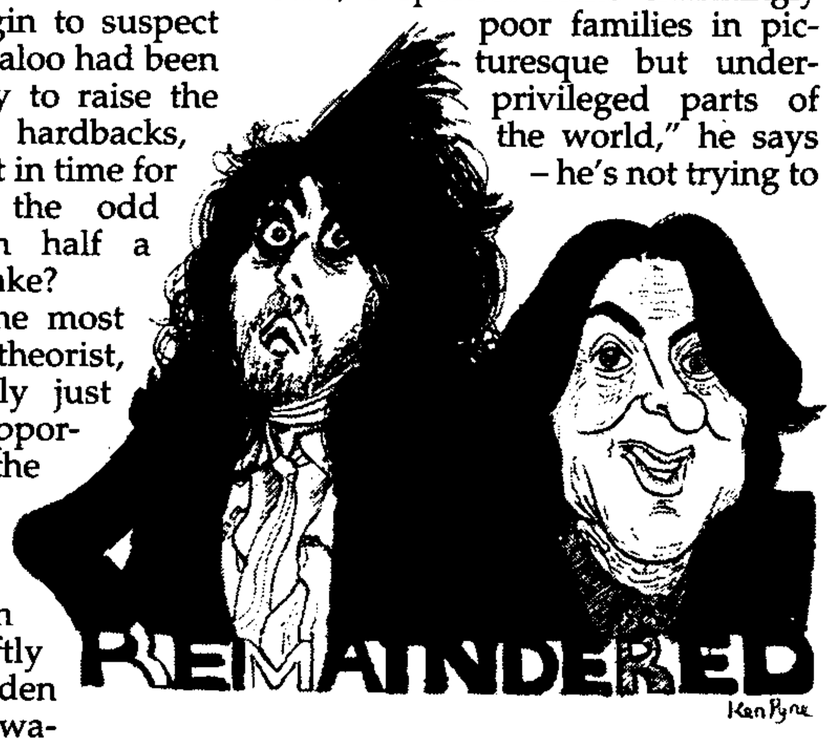
A pair of prankers

Why Do I Say These Things?
Jonathan Ross
(Bantam Press, £18.99)

Articles of Faith
Russell Brand
(HarperCollins, £15.99)

Now there's a coincidence. Of course, if we didn't know better, we might begin to suspect that the whole hullabaloo had been generated specifically to raise the profile of these two hardbacks, both conveniently out in time for Christmas. What's the odd ruined career when half a million sales are at stake?

But for all but the most deranged conspiracy theorist, these books probably just represent a timely opportunity to get into the heads of their authors, who may not be in a position to promote them much in person. How swiftly and cruelly can golden careers be derailed nowadays, and how much simple pleasure it gives to so many people.



Woss's book is a sort-of-autobiography-but-not-really, a genre gaining increasing popularity among celebrities who want the cash from doing a book but don't want to give too much away about themselves. In truth it's just a series of comic riffs based vaguely around incidents in his life. In the foreword he admits that he didn't actually sit down and write it; he talked it and someone else transcribed it. And you can tell: it's the book of someone who rarely stops talking. He'll spend a page describing a forward roll he once did. There are 15 pages on his pets, and three pages about how he used to like jumping on Routemaster buses as a boy.

If he did write a proper autobiography it would be 20 volumes long. Not that he can stick with any one subject for too long; as in life, he is the king of digression, the master of tangent. He will start rambling on about something, which sparks off another train of thought, which eventually leads back to the original subject, probably by accident.

About the only time he really concentrates is when he comes up with a joke he really likes. It will make you laugh the first time he tells it, less so the second time a paragraph later, and not at all by the fifth or sixth time a page or so later. His verbal incontinence could run a small power station.

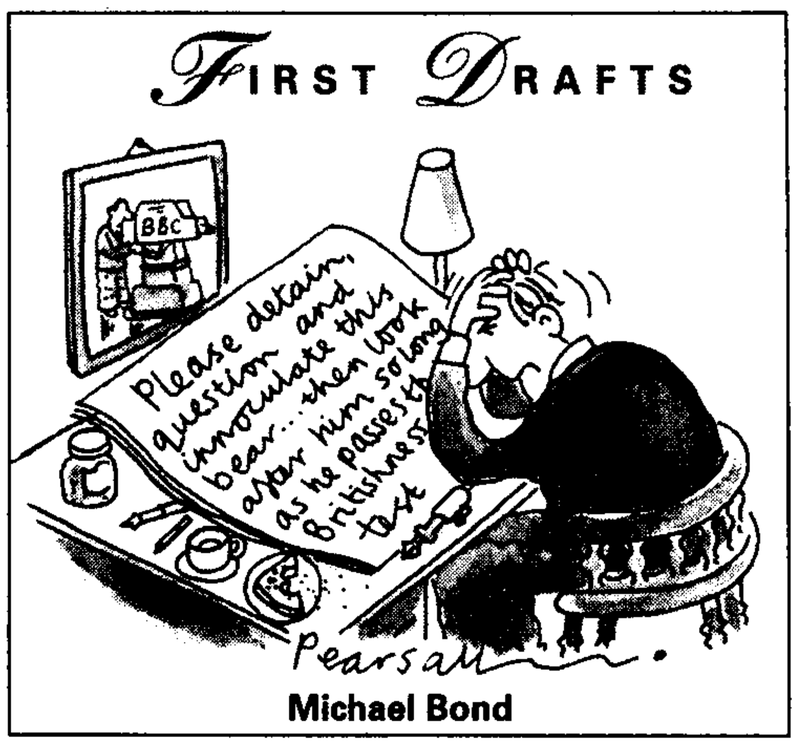
Which is why he gets into trouble. "Like many of you, I'm sure, I sponsor some charmingly poor families in picturesque but underprivileged parts of the world," he says – he's not trying to be horrible, he's just being a bit provocative. But while in person he has the charm to get away with these things, on the page it can come over as smug and a bit creepy. Throughout the book he drifts from "I" to "we" and back again, as though he's not quite sure how many of him there are. He's also a hilarious namedropper. "Morrissey came round for dinner one night – you know, the pop star." Yes, we know.

More than anything, though, Woss is obsessed with sex. He tells us where in his house he has done it with his wife, he gives the full lowdown on his genital wart... like all monologuists, he clearly enjoys the telling far more than anyone else could possibly enjoy the listening. And yet, just occasionally, in between the adolescent porn tales and the hilarious diarrhoea anecdotes, he is funny and acute and full of ideas. These qualities have been easy to forget over the past few weeks.

Russell Brand's book, like last year's *My Booky Wook*, is altogether less attractive. Advance publicity tried to imply that this was the exciting follow-up: My Sequely Wequel, if you like. Of course it's nothing of the sort: it's just his *Guardian* sport columns thrown together. Rarely has a collection of shabby old journalism been published so stylishly, and never, as far as I'm aware, with its writer posing as Christ on the front cover.

But the big problem for HarperCollins is that Brand's core readership is female, young and wants to have sex with him. And this book is almost entirely about football. While it's nice to know that Brand has one more interest in life other than his own vast, damaged ego, it does make you wonder who exactly is going to read it. Unless you are a football obsessive, it's scarcely comprehensible. And football fans, if they can work out what he's going on about, may not relish all the colour photos of Brand looking as though he is being pleasured by lovelies off-camera.

But as he says in his introduction, he doesn't care whether you buy the book as he's already been paid for it. Hubris could be his middle name. Where on earth is Nemesis when you need her?


FIRST DRAFTS
BBC
Please detain, question and incriminate this bear... then work after him so long as he passes the British test
Pearsall
Michael Bond

Books & Bookmen

■ SOMETHING strange happened last week: Richard and Judy recommended some books and hardly anyone noticed.

Things are superficially just as they were last year, with the pair once again picking coffee-table, stocking-filler and children's titles (and somewhat sheepishly adding a new "serious non-fiction" category) in their Christmas list. But they've recently relocated from Channel 4 to a remote corner of the TV galaxy called "Watch". According to the latest weekly figures, their top-rated programme was seen by 50,000, their lowest by 21,000 (and as they're now in peak-time, it's arguable that a lower proportion of these hardcore loyalists are potential book-buyers).

The publishers' initial reaction has been rejoicing: no more devoting weeks ahead of the winter and summer Book Club announcements to prep for pitching titles to the show in the hope of bestseller-guaranteeing selection; no more commissioning of novels just because they resemble/copy one chosen last year; no more need for editors and bosses to dance attendance on R&J's producer, Amanda Ross. Schadenfreude all round!

But after a jig of joy (and perhaps relishing the novel experience of not returning a call from an R&J minion), their feelings may be less buoyant. Since 2004, publishers and booksellers have been dependent on Richard and Judy; a staggering proportion of sales, especially in fiction, has been either directly attributable to their show, or as secondary purchases by customers drawn into shops or online to acquire books the couple have recommended.

What will replace it if their influence wanes? Publishers, on second thoughts, might be feeling rather vulnerable.

■ THE mood is already wintry at HarperCollins, as a profits slump across Rupert Murdoch's global publishing firm forced Vicky Barnsley's UK outpost to freeze recruitment last week and "look at every cost item that affects our bottom line".

But luckily for Stephanie Merritt, Barnsley and her New York counterparts were still capable of a last big-spender spasm a week earlier when they agreed to pay a fortune for fiction by a writer best known for a well-received depression memoir: a "big six-figure" sum for UK and Commonwealth rights for a historical crime trilogy, and another "high six-figure deal" for US rights.

Sold to the publisher by Merritt's agent Jonny Geller – who previously turned *Guardian* armchair sage Jonathan Freedland into best-selling thriller writer Sam Bourne, also for HarperCollins – the trilogy is almost breathtakingly imitative. Not content with brazenly copying the CJ Sansom formula of court-centred Tudor detective stories, Merritt is also "reinventing" herself by adopting a name that's de-sexed and as Sansom-like as possible, with two initials and a two-syllable surname – SJ Perris (can Vicky, Jonny and Steffi be naughtily hoping to profit from hazy book buyers?) We've been here before, of course: "Sam Bourne" is comically close to Dan Brown.

In commercial publishers' strange mindset, "more of the same" is usually bliss – look at all the me-too Christmas fun-fact books already piling up in shops –

but in this case the copycat project looks a considerable gamble. *Heresy*, the first novel (a Sansomian title, naturally), is not due until 2010, by which time there will have been more series of *The Tudors*, more of David Starkey banging on about them, and no doubt more Philippa Gregory novels and film versions thereof. Plus the planned BBC adaptation of Sansom's series. Tudor fatigue could by then be universal.

■ BAD NEWS for Gordon Brown: our old chum Anthony Seldon, biographer of John Major and Tony Blair, is writing a book about him. Worse news for Gordon Brown: Seldon announced in the *Sunday Times* last weekend that the PM has a good "fighting chance" of winning the next general election.

No one has yet survived the Curse of Seldon. As *Eye* readers may recall, in October 1994 he wrote that John Major has "put the Tories on course for a fifth election victory". As late as October 1996 he foresaw that "the Tories in the general election could win back the by-election losses since 1992, which would give them a working majority... the Tories remain a formidable fighting force". Seven months later they duly suffered their worst electoral catastrophe since 1906.

Whereupon Seldon became the biographer of Tony Blair. He launched his book in the summer of 2004 with a prediction that by Christmas either the PM would quit or he'd sack Gordon Brown. "The current status quo can't go on." It duly went on for another three years.

Now he says that "only a fool would write off a Brown victory" at the next election. Gordon might as well give up now.

'Bookworm'

2 nights for the price of 3 in the 4* Fitzpatrick's Castle Hotel.

Advertisement, Discover Ireland

LIBRARY NEWS

■ SCHOOL librarian Clare Broadbelt was told she is no longer needed from January, because the library at the Meadows Community School in Chesterfield is to close.

But what school bosses actually said was that her post was no longer required because of "a move towards the relocation and redistribution of non-fiction and fiction resources in the light of new developments in Virtual Learning Environment and interactive learning". In other words, library and librarian were being replaced by the internet.

After a consultation in September, the chair of governors wrote to Mrs Broadbelt saying: "We feel that we are not removing a library from the school but changing the way it operates so that curriculum leaders will manage the resources from the internet. In terms of fiction material, we will maintain a reading centre in the school for use during break times and after-school clubs but do not feel that this needs a qualified librarian to run it."

This caught the eye of author Alan Gibbons, who writes mainly for teenagers and visits many school libraries every year to run events. He said that relying on the web for research was "a new wave of virtual philistinism". He has written to headteacher Lynn Asquith twice, but has had no reply.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Past Imperfect

Julian Fellowes

(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £17.99)

I HAD not seen my old friend – and of late embittered enemy – Peregrine Barrington-Smythe for nearly thirty-five years. Consequently it was with a certain amount of perturbation, not to say puzzlement at what the French call *une situation vraiment peculiere*, that I embarked upon the journey to what the more vulgar of our newspapers would probably refer to as his "country pile".

As I negotiated my automobile along the cramped Surrey lanes, now alas made hideous by the mock-Tudor habitations of parvenu stockbrokers, I considered the problem of Peregrine ("Perry" to his *intimes* although, as we knew to our cost, the intimacy was his to grant, not ours wantonly to solicit) whom, to a certain degree, I may be said to have invented.

Although never "one of us" in the accepted sense (Lloyd's money, then as now, bearing the unavoidable taint of commerce), not even nay-saying quidnuncs could deny that he was an unmitigated success, that his fortune was titanic, his lustre undimmed, his *éclat* unsilenced – the latter quite immoderately so. Yet his house, I must confess, alarmed me. While not traditional in an aristocratic sense, its authenticity may be said to have remained resolutely unproven. Clipped, terraced gardens, gleaming caryatids, Lutyens-style façade, regiment of maid-servants – all these gestured at a desire for only partly concealed ostentation that... [*continues for several pages*].

Admitted to the residence by a grovelling butler, I came upon him in his study – a faintly unreal sanctum, picturesquely furnished and revealing a spirit I had not previously associated with him – tottering by an altogether splendid piece of furniture which the uninformed would doubtless term a day-bed but I knew by its correct designation of *duchesse brisée*. He did not look well.

"So there you are," he said as I advanced, stubbing my toe against a particularly fine Louis XVI commode, not dissimilar to one I had once had the pleasure of relieving myself on while dining at Apsley House. "And about bloody time, too." I saw, with an instinctive feeling of trepidation, not experienced since that day at Magdalene when the Hon. Jasper de Toffe alleged that he could not find my name on the Winchester Old Boys' list, that Perry was Perry still. "I need to speak to you. You see, I'm dying."

"My dear chap," I said, as we proceeded to the dining-room, an oddly muted affair of William Morris-cum-Matalan *dishabille*. "What on earth of?"

"Terminal snobbery, I'm afraid. Picked up at Queen Charlotte's ball in 1969. The medics say there's nothing they can do..." (*continues endlessly*).

UPDATED CLASSICS

Jamie Oliver Twist

[Paul] Gambaccini described Douglas as one of the most loved, respected and admired executives in the radio business. He said her departure was a "tragedy which is Greek in its dimensions".

He said the former Radio 2 controller was like Achilles, a "great warrior brought low by his heel... Lesley Douglas was brought low by Russell Brand".

Guardian

Ayrton Senna's belief in his own near-divinity and Michael Schumacher's sheer unscrupulousness set an example to Hamilton and Massa as surely as Bach begat Beethoven and Cezanne begat Picasso.

RICHARD WILLIAMS,
Guardian

I've always been fascinated by the notion of other-worldly scents. For Odeur de Lune we worked with Nasa soil analysis from the lunar landings and mixed the findings with scents of kerosene and metal.

Candle-maker RAMDANE TOUHAMI,
The Times

Her new works are humorous in a more furtive way, and still possess a trace of both the deprecations and the tenderness that have marked even her most dismal

Pseuds Corner

juxtapositions. Sometimes a shard of stone or a branch substitutes (maybe we should say 'stands for') the cock or the testicles. In one sculpture, a plaster cast of a finger doubles for a cock, and pokes out of a scrap of tree bark that looks like a crotch. There are penises and branches as wands and weapons, dildoes and axes, bones and knives. Every form seems both complete and malleable, both thing and an image.

ADRIAN SEARLE on Sarah Lucas's 'Penetralia' sculptures, *Guardian*

May 68: Toward the Naming of the Event

Aptly referred to at the time as 'la breche' (breach, rupture') and 'eclatement' (explosion, outburst), yet forty years later the "May '68 events" have still to be named. Indeed today we are still waiting for the political nomination of these opaque events to be completed. But we are not merely waiting; we are eager to come to grips with this excess and therefore to pursue the related tasks of politically unfolding its consequences and philosophically operating its contemporary articulation with ruptures produced elsewhere and thinking the re-emergence of new possibles [sic] and thus the very possibility of a true politics.

Flyer for one-day seminar at the University of Salford

What were the last three things you bought?

A table light made from a twig, by a graduating Royal College of Art student; one of Frederikson Stallard's Ming vases; and Max Lamb's Felt Stool. Those, and coffee, a croissant and a Eurostar ticket.

Gallery owner and former Design Museum curator LIBBY SELLERS, *Sunday Times*

CONTRIBUTORS: John Naylor, James Morrow, Sheila McIntosh, Cary Johnston, Keith Flett, Lucy Roberts.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

THE PAUL FOOT AWARD 2008

AFTER a record number of entries and some exceptional examples of investigative digging, the judges of the Paul Foot Award for Campaigning Journalism 2008 decided to split this year's prize between two winners: Camilla Cavendish of the *Times* and Richard Brooks of *Private Eye*.

Announcing the winners at a ceremony in London on 3 November, Ian Hislop, editor of *Private Eye*, said: "The standard was so high this year that the judges had to give a joint award, shared by a forensic financial investigation into a government scandal and a dogged critical campaign against legal injustice. Both are firmly in the tradition of first-rate journalism that Paul Foot exemplified."

Cavendish won for her investigation into the many injustices which have resulted from the Children Act 1989 and the professional cultures that have grown up around child "protection", and Brooks for his investigation into the mismanagement and financial irregularities behind the sale of the key governmental development business, Actis. They shared the £6,000 prize money, with the four runners-up receiving £1,000 each.

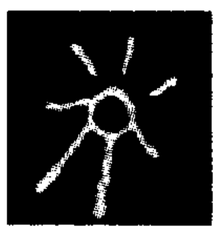
Joint winners Richard Brooks of *Private Eye* and Camilla Cavendish of the *Times*

Private Eye and the *Guardian* set up the award in memory of Paul Foot, the journalist and left-wing campaigner who died in 2004. Alan Rusbridger, editor of the *Guardian,* said: "I think Paul would have admired the two winners for very different reasons. Richard Brooks is a digger and a troublemaker who niggles away at difficult subjects in a meticulous, punchy and highly effective way. Camilla Cavendish would have appealed to Paul's campaigning heart for the way in which she pursued one story through thick and thin. Both are extremely worthy winners in the Foot tradition."

● Results and pictures at www.private-eye.co.uk.

ACTIS

All change (or not)



THE *Eye's* coverage of the commercialisation of publicly-owned international development fund CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation, has finally led international development secretary Douglas Alexander to announce a re-think.

Last week, after years of moving out of investments helping the poorest people in the world and into Chinese hotel chains, South African tax avoidance consultancies and shopping malls for the African middle classes, it was announced that CDC will in future invest at least 75 percent of its funds in "low income countries", defined as those with gross national income per capita of less than $905.

The new policy is, however, silent on what CDC will invest in. So managers at its privatised fund management arm Actis, who are on private equity-style profit shares on investments, can still stick to big cash generators such as mining and financial services rather than investments directed at the overwhelmingly rural poor of Africa which are recognised as more developmentally valuable.

As Lib Dem shadow development secretary Michael Moore told the *Eye*: "There are welcome movements in this new strategy, particularly the increased targets for investment in sub-Saharan Africa. However, it is disappointing that there are no sectoral targets, particularly when investment in agriculture and green businesses is crucial in tackling the crises of food security and climate change."

Nor is there much urgency to improve working conditions – just a vague commitment to "encourage the businesses in which CDC's capital is invested to work over time towards full compliance with [international labour conventions] and with the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights".

Accountability isn't high up the agenda either, as the fund that launched a PR campaign on its development impact rather than hand over official reports on the subject (see *Eye* 1219) won't be reporting publicly on its development performance. "Given the difficulties CDC has experienced this year, this is a missed opportunity to establish full openness and transparency in CDC's operations," said Moore. How true.

● MUCH more quietly, meanwhile, the fund management arm Actis filed its 2007 accounts at Companies House last week.

The firm is a "limited liability partnership", an early New Labour creation usually adopted by accountancy firms to protect bosses from being sued. It was already known (see *Eye* 1220) that the firm's turnover was $140m, more than double the predicted $63m when 60 percent of the outfit was sold off by the Department for International Development (DfID) in 2004 for a pittance. Now something of where the $140m (of which $80m was "incentive fees") went can be revealed.

The firm's 187 employees shared pay totalling $123m, or an average (right down to the lowliest clerk) of $658,000. This was a whopping 85 percent rise on 2006 and three times 2005 pay rates. Of this, an average $490,000 came from "long term performance payments", even though Actis had only been going for 3.5 years by December 2007.

The Actis partners, including the senior partner Paul Fletcher who as CDC chief executive in 2004 sold the majority of Actis to, er, himself, were left with $11m. The partner taking the largest slug of this, almost certainly Fletcher, trousered $1.6m. The accounts also reveal that "Actis Executive limited partners" are also owed $22m. The Actis Executive Limited Partnership, a separate legal entity, is itself owned by senior Actis executives.

Yet this is just the start of the bonanza. The serious money for Fletcher and co emerges in the form of "carried interest", a private equity term for profit shares on sales of investments. This racks up secretly and very tax-efficiently (subject in 2007 to 10 percent capital gains tax at most, rather than 40 percent income tax) in "limited partnerships", of which the partners are a further series of Scottish limited partners owned by the Actis bosses. Happily for them, these vehicles don't have to produce accounts. In 2007 they would have been well stuffed with cash as Actis sold, on CDC's behalf, most of its power investment Globeleq for a £281m gain.

All of which explains the Actis strategy of targeting the most profitable investments with little regard to development.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

$800 *Annual* per capita income in sub-Saharan Africa

$1,800 *Daily* per capita income at Actis

PRESS FREEDOM

Staggering!

EVER since Watergate, investigative reporters have known that the cover-up can do more damage to their targets than the original crime. They are now daring to hope that lawyers at Carter-Fuck have over-reached themselves in their frantic efforts to censor critical reports about the convicted Iraqi fraudster Nadhmi Auchi.

As the last *Eye* reported, Carter-Fuck swung into action when the world started to take an interest in the plutocrat after Barack Obama's friend and Auchi's business partner Tony Rezko was convicted of 16 counts of fraud and money-laundering by a Chicago jury. To date, its success in scrubbing the web on behalf of a criminal client has been near total.

The *Observer*, *Telegraph* and *New Statesman* all removed articles from their sites rather than face a cripplingly expensive libel action that might drag on for years. The US freedom of information site Wikileaks is now the only place in the world where readers can find the banned reports.

Observer lawyers were the most spineless. They not only agreed to delete a series of articles from 2003 but also accepted that there were "substantial inaccuracies" in their journalists' reporting. The National Union of Journalists told the *Eye* that the reporters weren't consulted. It stood by their journalism and was willing to take action to protect their professional integrity.

Emboldened by the *Observer*'s surrender, Carter-Fuck has gone writ-happy. Last month the *New Statesman*'s website mentioned in passing that readers could read more about Auchi by looking at Wikileaks. Threatening letters duly followed demanding that the *Staggers* take down the link, which it did, and demanding a grovelling apology and, of course, loads of money – an ultimatum Auchi may yet regret.

The American journalists who run Wikileaks checked out the Auchi story before putting it on their site. They watched the censorship in London with amazement and decided to act. According to a letter seen by Index on Censorship, they tell Jason Cowley, editor of the *New Statesman*, that any apology suggesting the reports contained "substantial inaccuracies" would be libellous. "Such a statement will defame the professionalism of our investigative reporters and writers," they wrote. "These include editor Julian Assange and former Pentagon aide John Shaw."

Not only will Wikileaks sue, it will invite all the maligned Fleet Street hacks to join their action. "Auchi and his representatives have never contacted us to question or qualify any material appearing in our publications, or indeed at all," the Wikileaks letter concludes. "As such we consider his behaviour in relation to the *New Statesman* linking to our articles a clear mischief. We warn the *New Statesman* not [to] make itself a party to this mischief."

The threat is not an idle one. As the *Eye* has reported, the judiciary has prostituted the English law by turning London into the libel tourism capital of the world. Even the law lords can't stop honest journalists from Wikileaks flying in from Washington and suing, too.

Meanwhile, leading British lawyers are disgusted by Auchi's success in silencing a supine media, and are willing to help. Anthony Julius, of Princess Diana fame, has offered his services free to journalists who are sued by Auchi or feel the need to protect their reputations by suing the *Observer*, the *New Statesman* or anyone else.

This leaves Cowley with a problem. He recently arrived at the *Statesman* after editing the arts magazine *Granta* and is a literary gent, more used to dealing with Booker Prize juries than high court judges. Now he faces being sued by Auchi if he doesn't apologise or being sued by the Americans and half the investigative reporters in London if he does.

'Ratbiter'

EXTRADITION ROW

It's all Greek

ANDREW Symeou, pictured, the 20-year-old accused of killing a fellow holidaymaker at a disco on the Greek island of Zante last year (*Eye* 1217), is to appeal against a judge's ruling last month that he should be extradited to face trial.

Lawyers for the Bournemouth University student fear he will not get a fair trial in Greece, claiming that seriously flawed and contradictory evidence against him has been manipulated or fabricated by police.

Symeou is accused of striking 18-year-old Jonathan Hiles with such force that he fell off a nightclub stage, suffering fatal head injuries. The student denies ever punching anyone in his life, and certainly not Mr Hiles; and says he only learnt about the incident after he had returned home at the end of his 18-30 holiday.

Eye readers will recall that at the heart of the troubling case are two statements implicating Symeou, obtained by Greek police from two of his friends after they had been detained for eight hours and physically and verbally assaulted. The statements were in Greek and the teenagers had no idea what they were signing.

But district judge Quentin Purdy, who ordered the extradition, described their accounts as "surprisingly uninspiring", with difficulty in recounting the apparent horror of their ordeal at the hands of police. However, he accepted they had been intimidated "if not subjected to some force by Greek police".

The moment they were released, the two boys had complained to British consular officials and their concerns were supported by a Club 18-30 rep. She saw the boys in some distress at the police station and insisted on getting her own translator before making a statement to police. The two boys, as the judge noted, were not so robust.

Complaints about abuse and fabricated evidence go much further, however, including word-for-word identical witness statements from the victim's friends that are markedly different from statements taken from the same friends by police in Wales on behalf of the coroner, who is to conduct an inquest.

In the meantime, other CCTV footage and evidence from the nightclub, and from the other bars and clubs Symeou visited that night has been lost. His lawyers argue it would prove beyond doubt that he was not – as he and his friends maintain – even at the club at the time.

However, the judge said these were matters for the trial, not for him. Under the terms of the European arrest warrant (EAW), judges in this country no longer have to decide if there is any credible evidence or a case to answer before agreeing to extradition. Adding to the concerns of lawyers and human-rights groups, the European parliament has just widened the powers of the EAW to allow courts to try foreign suspects in their absence.

Judge Purdy said: "This court has no jurisdiction to enquire into the process leading to the issue of a domestic warrant" – despite evidence given in court challenging the validity of the arrest warrant.

Defending Symeou, John Jones had claimed that the EAW procedure had ignored the due process of law since Symeou had not been summoned, no evidence had been given against him, he had never been interviewed by Greek or British police and no explanation had been given to him before the warrant was issued – 10 months after the event.

Of the appeal, Symeou's father Frank said: "It's not that Andrew wants to avoid court. Far from it, he is desperate to properly clear his name through the courts. He wants the Hiles family to know he had nothing to do with their son's tragic death. We have gathered plenty of evidence to prove he is innocent and that the police concocted and changed evidence."

USELESS LAWYERS

Trials and tribulations

A MAN who has served 17 years for a murder he says he did not commit has won a high court case for negligence against his former defence solicitors – a victory he hopes may help him finally clear his name.

The judge said that but for the solicitors' failure, Karl Watson, now 46, would have been able to prove years ago that he had not had a fair trial. Watson, a father of four, was jailed in 1991 for the murder of businessman and serial womaniser John Shippey, who had been having an affair with Watson's mother. Shippey had been repeatedly stabbed in the chest and his body, burned beyond recognition, was found in his car near Mersham, Surrey.

Watson was, along with several others, arrested and questioned, but he was released after it was established that he had an alibi. Then, nearly a year and a half later, he was re-arrested. A man called Bruce Cousins had been discovered with a "script" saying that he had been involved in the murder. He later made a statement saying he had been made to do it by Watson.

His testimony – that he saw Watson stab Shippey and then helped him dispose of the body – was the only evidence against Watson. At Watson's failed appeal against conviction in January 1996, Lord Taylor, then the lord chief justice, said the crown's case was put "on the basis that Mr Cousins as a witness could be relied upon". But it emerged that there were several psychiatric reports questioning Cousins' veracity. He was, it seems, extremely suggestible and easily led – to the extent that anxiety over negative feedback would make him change his answers, irrespective of the facts.

None of this was disclosed to Watson's lawyers before his trial and Watson instructed fresh solicitors, Chapple and Co, to bring a case before the European court of human rights on the basis that he had been denied a fair hearing, in breach of article six. Although he was informed that the case had been sent to Strasbourg, he later found that it had never been submitted. It seems the matter only came to light after the solicitor in question was asked to leave the firm, for other reasons. He never worked in the legal profession again and died two years ago.

After Watson launched his civil action, Mr Justice Owen finally gave his judgment last month. He said that "had there been a hearing before the ECHR, the likely outcome would have been a finding of a breach of Article 6", and he praised Watson's new legal team for representing him pro bono.

The case is now out of time and cannot go to Europe, but it can be used as part of Watson's submission to the criminal cases review commission. "The case is a double scandal," said Maslen Merchant, Watson's lawyer. "The prosecution denied my client a fair trial and a previous defence lawyer denied him the opportunity to put right the original wrong."

YOUTH DETENTION

Oakhill felled

IT'S BEEN a bad month for bosses at Oakhill Secure Training Centre (STC), the child jail run by Group 4 Securicor (G4S) near Milton Keynes. A series of damning reports have revealed that the troubled centre for 12 to 14 year olds and vulnerable 15 year olds is still not up to the task of caring for or rehabilitating young criminals.

First, new figures released under freedom of information in early October revealed that Oakhill had seen the highest number of restraint incidents – 1,493 between October 2006 and June 2008 – of any secure youth institution. This was far more than the much larger YOIs holding older teenagers.

Then the Council of Europe's human rights commissioner Thomas Hammarberg produced a report on Britain's juvenile justice system, which singled out Oakhill for criticism. "The centre had faced a turbulent year of violent incidents and staff had been unable to handle situations, which led, among other things, to children being handcuffed," said Hammarberg's report.

The government's somewhat feeble response, printed in an appendix to Hammarberg's report, was that the Youth Justice Board "is looking to the operators to make urgent improvements". But hasn't G4S had enough time to make improvements?

One report found inadequate child protection and improper use of physical restraint at Oakhill (see *Eye* 1150) as long ago as January 2006. The centre is designed to house 80 young people but that was limited to 56 in 2007 after prisons inspectors condemned the "staggering" levels of use of force by staff.

Finally, Ofsted inspectors also laid into Oakhill last month after a return visit found that "significant inadequacies" uncovered in their inspection earlier this year still hadn't been tackled. They also said management of the centre was still poor.

THE CARDIFF THREE

White light

WHEN Mark Grommek changed his plea to guilty, ending his trial for perjury at Cardiff crown court at the end of last month, it turned the spotlight back on to the police officers who framed the Cardiff Three for the infamous Valentine's Day murder of Lynette White 20 years ago (*Eyes passim*).

What made the Cardiff Three stitch-up so different was that after the convictions of Yusef Abdullahi, Stephen Miller and Tony Paris were overturned by the appeal court, the police re-opened the case and solved it in 2003 by catching Jeffrey Gafoor through a DNA match. His conviction – the first after a miscarriage had been overturned – then opened a can of worms over how the original case against the Cardiff Three (and two acquitted co-defendants) had been put together by police and how they had treated witnesses who claimed to have seen the accused at Lynette White's flat, where the murder took place.

The prosecution case in the perjury trial was that while Grommek (who lived in the flat above) had been bullied by police into making up a story implicating the accused in the murder, he could have withdrawn his false testimony before it came to trial.

Prosecuting barrister Nicholas Dean QC accepted that Grommek had been mistreated and abused by police but argued that since he was not threatened with violence after November 1988, the perjury charges related to what he said later at the trial when he could have withdrawn his statements.

Grommek argued that he still felt under duress; but when the judge ruled that that defence was not available to him, he changed his plea to guilty. What must have worried the police officers who organised the frame up is that Grommek's barrister, David Aubrey QC, announced that Grommek was "prepared to make witness statements and give evidence in court in due course, if he is required, against any police officers who may be charged".

See Defence Special overleaf ➤

DEFENCE SPECIAL

FAULTY GUNS

Chain non-reaction

THE Ministry of Defence is facing yet more pressure over the "chain gun" on the Warrior vehicle, a machine gun that has a habit of shooting when it shouldn't. The firm that supplied the apparently faulty gun system, BAE Systems, has not been criticised, however.

The Warrior is the tracked vehicle used to transport soldiers on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, and its chain gun is reloaded by an electric motor and fired by an electric pedal inside the vehicle. Internal papers leaked to the press reveal that the army had known it was involved in "undemanded fire" incidents since at least 1999 in which British troops have been injured and Iraqi civilians unintentionally killed.

In 2003 a British soldier had his leg shot off in Iraq; but rather than investigating and fixing the fault, the army prosecuted a blameless gunner, whose conviction was overturned by an appeal.

Five years on, the MoD has still not started to fix the fault, earning it condemnation from, among others, the Tory defence spokesman Liam Fox, who described the failure to fix the gun system as a "scandal". What Fox has not criticised, however, is the supplying of the gun in the first place. Indeed, he appeared at the Tory party conference on a platform paid for by BAE Systems, where he told delegates: "I don't think we support our defence industry enough."

Fox argued that the government needed to help companies like BAE sell arms in "developing nations" and that they needed "people preparing the market for the UK, and that usually means someone in uniform". So, instead of criticising BAE, Fox thinks soldiers should be acting as salesmen for the company. Very novel. When asked about its responsibility for the problem gun, BAE Systems declined to comment.

AFGHANISTAN

The fog of war

JUST how badly is the anti-Taliban war effort faring in Afghanistan? If ministerial bluster in the Commons the other day was any guide, the answer appears to be a rather worrying one.

Bolshy Labour MP Paul Flynn (Newport West) rose in defence questions to ask about the territory in Afghanistan currently controlled by a) the Afghan government, b) the Taliban, c) warlords. His question was given the rhubarb treatment by foggy-voiced minister Bob Ainsworth, a toothbrush-moustached thug who used to be a whip and sounds as though he is speaking through a dirty sock.

Ainsworth's Whitehall-prepared reply did not address Flynn's specific question on a), b) or c). Of course not! Don't be so naive. Instead he waffled about how "the deployment of additional forces under NATO in 2006" had helped quell the natives and how "the key to success is winning the allegiance of the Afghan people".

A disgruntled Flynn started saying: "I am not grateful for that evasive answer..." when he was interrupted by the Speaker and told to withdraw the remark. "Nooo Minister would be evasive on the floor of the House," said Speaker Martin, a plainly absurd claim which drew prolonged laughter, not least from the press gallery. The Speaker glowered.

Flynn, citing "American intelligence" (shome mishtake, surely? Ed), claimed that "we are now in a position where the Taliban and the warlords control far more territory than the elected government". Was it not time to seek a negotiated peace settlement?

Ainsworth: "Nobody has ever suggested that it is a purely military matter." If you think that sounds like an admission that the ground war is in reverse gear at present, you might not be so very wrong.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock), another Labour MP who is off the whips' Christmas party list, said that if "evasive" was too "base" a word to describe ministers, how about "bewildered"? Mackinlay had recently asked how many of the 13 districts of Helmand province were controlled by NATO and the Afghan government. The official reply he was given had only referred to the British military "presence".

As Mackinlay noted: "There is a world of difference between presence and having control." He therefore asked Ainsw orth (who was by now colouring up) "which districts of Helmand are held and controlled by the Taliban?"

Ainsworth paused, gulped and then said: "We are running a counter-insurgency operation in Afghanistan, not a straightforward war in the traditional sense. It is about winning the hearts and minds and controlling territory is only part of that... There are no straightforward front lines." Eye readers will again note that this answer was, to use the technical term, a "body swerve". Mackinlay's question was not addressed.

Flynn later returned to the matter, asking Speaker Martin if "evasive" was now officially to be classed as "unparliamentary language" (ie banned in the Commons). Martin: "Unparliamentary language is a bit strong. I am saying that the Hon Gentleman should not direct that term at ministers." Er. So is it permitted or not to accuse ministers of evasion? With that level of clarity, Martin should maybe become a minister.

The same session of defence questions also saw a prolonged Tory ramp against new minister Quentin Davies, himself a former Tory until he defected to Labour at the start of the Gordon Brown regime. Davies had been caught saying stupid things about soldiers being killed in "snatch" Land Rovers. His remarks were widely interpreted as a suggestion that such deaths were caused by commanders choosing the wrong sort of equipment.

New defence secretary John Hutton kept being caught in the Commons fray and looked distinctly unthrilled, fuelling rumours that the "morning prayers" that day at the MoD, when ministers met for their daily briefing, had been a distinctly frosty affair for the loose-tongued Davies.

'Gavel Basher'

DEFENCE TRAINING

No retreat

THE Ministry of Defence is increasingly desperate to save its faltering plan to privatise military training at a new defence academy at St Athan, South Wales, despite having acknowledged that the £12bn PFI deal is unaffordable and poses risks to the frontline (see *Eye* 1213).

With the credit crunch also having put costs up by £1bn, something has to give. So when defence minister Bob Ainsworth announced that the MoD was ploughing ahead, he pointed out that "considerable progress has been made in driving down costs". This will involve cutting the length of training courses by 25 percent through "compression, rationalisation and harmonisation". Officially that means cutting waste but those involved in defence training say there is nothing like the scope for 25 percent cuts.

So defence training will have to suffer to spare the PFI deal, even though the off-balance sheet allure of PFI – which defence ministers admitted was the reason for a PFI in the first place – has vanished as all PFIs are going back on the books. Could it be because the deal is so crucial to the companies lining up for it? QinetiQ, the defence research company privatised by the MoD but on which it remains reliant, admits in its 2008 accounts: "There is a risk that the MoD may materially change the final scope or delay or cancel the implementation of the programme, which would have a significant effect on the expected future growth of the group."

Other firms have already got their snouts in the trough. The programme has cost £35m so far, of which £12m has gone on consultancy. The biggest earner, predictably, is PwC which has received almost £1m a year for advising the MoD. With the plan already well delayed, the MoD's commercial director, Amyas Morse, who joined from PwC in 2006, will be signing its cheques for a while yet.

PRIVATE SECURITY

Soldiers of misfortune

THE resignation of Michael Wilson as head of the Security Industry Authority, the government watchdog which oversees security contractors, following revelations that some of its staff had not been properly vetted, will have come as little surprise to former soldiers in the industry.

They have long known that many security "experts", close protection companies and bodyguards have avoided proper scrutiny and operated on the basis of wildly exaggerated or uncorroborated claims about their qualifications.

One such, according to a growing number of military contributors to the British Army Rumour website, is James "Jimbo" Shortt (pictured), director-general of the International Bodyguard Association (IBA), which offers "training and security services" in several countries.

Jimbo, or "Baron" Castleshortt, boasts a list of awards that cannot be confirmed, including a number of "Papal honours" given "for ending the Cold War" and various gongs presented by Prince Karl Freidrich von Deutschland, the princes and counts of the Holy Roman Empire and The Almanach de Chivalry. These illustrious bodies all share a PO box in, er, Teddington.

More disturbingly, he claims to have been "attached" to 21 SAS and badged with the Parachute Regiment. Soldiers who have served in both regiments have tried but failed to find any substantial evidence for these claims.

Shortt may have been, as he claims, a "Parachute & Ranger qualified Cadet with the 1st Cadet Bn Queen's Regt", but this is a civilian organisation, not a military unit. And in order to run first aid courses for security clients, Shortt claims to be a Registered General Nurse – but there is no record of him attending training. He says he has "registrations" with paramedics but he would have to be employed by the ambulance service in order to do this and no ambulance trust has ever heard of him.

Shortt does not appreciate scrutiny. When squaddies discovered that his baronial title was, er, suspect, he placed his critics under surveillance by the "Gallogas Guards" of which he is "Colonel".

Meanwhile, in Ireland, University College Dublin has recently hired Pulse Security Management to provide campus security. Students have complained about some of the heavy handed methods of their guards and the Gardai are currently investigating two assaults involving Pulse staff. Pulse personnel are trained by Jimbo's IBA and its website carries a fulsome endorsement from the Baron.

'Squarebasher'

In the City

TWO Conservative donors are in potential trouble with the taxman, who is querying aspects of their companies' tax affairs, threatening embarrassment for David Cameron and George Osborne as they promise tax cuts.

Hedge-fund manager Lewis Chester's company, Pentagon Capital Management, has been in dispute with Revenue & Customs since at least last year. HMRC is querying various tax deductions made by the company. The possible corporation tax liability is £6.5m.

Chester, who was at Oxford with Cameron, and his wife Natalie have given £150,000 to the Tories since 2006. Chester, who donated £100,000, is also the target of a civil fraud case brought by the Securities & Exchange Commission accusing him and Pentagon of ripping off US mutual-fund investors for $62m through "late trading" and "market timing" abuses.

Even more generous has been Robert Edmiston, the owner of motor importers and property investors IM Group. An evangelical Christian, Edmiston has donated millions to the charity Christian Vision, which funds radio stations around the globe. However, since at least last year the taxman has been querying the tax status of the proceeds from the sale of an asset donated to Christian Vision. The potential corporation tax liability could be "significant".

"Bloody corporate boxes – never watch the game"

Ironically, a previous dispute with the Revenue was said to have cost Edmiston a Tory-proposed peerage in 2005. The nomination was blocked by the Lords appointment commission after details of the tax dispute were revealed – HMRC is one of the bodies consulted before a peerage is awarded.

That dispute was reportedly settled during 2005. Edmiston was quizzed by police as part of the "cash for honours" investigation. No action was subsequently taken. He had personally given £250,000 to the Tories in 2004 and IM Group made a £2m loan in 2005, which was waived the following year, including £90,000 in interest. Edmiston was also chairman of the Midlands Industrial Council, which has given the Tories more than £1.5m since 2003. IM Properties has in addition given £170,000 in the past two years to Constituency Campaigning Services, which helps the Tories target marginal seats.

Pentagon is controlled by Chester and his father. The company announced in March that it was closing its highly successful hedge-fund operations and returning money to investors following notification of the SEC action. At the time, Pentagon was said to be managing £1bn in some 17 funds.

Since 2000 Pentagon has paid dividends of just over £81m, of which more than half has gone to the Chester family. Since 1999 it has paid its directors almost £12m in salaries.

The tax dispute was first revealed in Pentagon's 2006 accounts, filed in August last year. The 2007 accounts state: "The company's tax advisers strongly believe that HMRC has no statutory basis for disallowing such deductions and are prepared to defend the company's position vigorously."

No doubt they will prevail if they have not done so already.

The SEC sued Pentagon, Chester and the Pentagon Special Purpose Fund in April. PSPF was closed last year. The SEC accuses Chester et al of defrauding US mutual funds (unit trusts) and their shareholders through late trading and deceptive market timing practices from June 1999 until September 2003 – when it was announced that then New York State attorney general Eliot Spitzer had settled fraud charges for late trading against another hedge fund for $40m. This pressed the panic button on Wall Street and killed the business. Since then some 20 brokers, hedge funds and mutual-fund groups have settled with the SEC and paid more than $4bn in fines, penalties and fee cuts for investors.

Chester and Pentagon are accused of making the $62m over those four years in "illicit profits" which the SEC wants disgorged, plus penalties. Chester and Pentagon are accused of benefiting from this trading by way of management and performance fees. Chester is accused of directing the trading by the Pentagon fund (PSPF). He was one of the two fund managers.

"Market timing" involves large-scale, quick-fire buying and selling of mutual fund shares to arbitrage movements in the wider stock market. Mutual fund prices or net asset values are dependent on the movements up or down of their underlying investments. Most funds seek to prevent this short-term dealing as sales mean paying out cash and the in-and-out trades raise their costs. It is also not something small investors can do. Market timing was estimated to have cost small US investors $400m a year.

The SEC complaint includes a June 2002 email from Chester to a US broker in which he is said to have written: "Chaps, I NEVER want to see the words 'market timing' on any correspondence, email, telephone call etc. If you want to label what we do with something, call it 'dynamic asset allocation' but never market timing!"

When funds detected such Pentagon trades, the SEC says it used deception via multiple accounts and identities and trading through numerous brokers to get round the bans on market timing by hiding their identity.

"Late trading" involves trading after the 4pm market close so as to take advantage of announcements after Wall Street trading has ended but still using the historic price of the mutual funds that had not been adjusted to take account of those events. The SEC says Pentagon paid double the normal 1 percent commission to obtain access to late trading.

The SEC complaint accuses Pentagon of also engaging in market-timing activities in UK and European mutual funds from the 1990s. By September 2003 Chester was said to be making returns of 37 percent at a time when the market had been falling from 2000 until early 2003.

Chester claimed to have negotiated agreements to trade quickly in and out of UK mutual, pension and investment funds with several fund management groups. However, some UK groups had banned market timing.

The Fundamentally Supine Authority, which regulates Chester and Pentagon, carried out an investigation in 2003-4 but took no action. Not for the first time, the SEC was more determined. It began a five-year investigation culminating in the action it announced in April and supported with an amended complaint in September that it says details the case against Pentagon in "excruciating detail" and accuses it of causing "extensive harm".

Chester and Pentagon strenuously deny the allegations and are seeking to dismiss the SEC case on several legal grounds at a hearing in New York next month.

Edmiston's troubles with the taxman appear to have been caused by trying to do God's work rather than capitalism red in tooth and claw. For many years he has been making annual multi-million donations from his IM empire to Christian Vision to finance its evangelical efforts, mainly in Africa and Asia. Last year he donated £17m on top of the £60m given in the previous five years alone.

The donations often utilise the Gift Aid scheme, whereby donations are grossed up with basic-rate tax paid being reclaimed by the charity, but also sometimes the donations have been of assets such as shares or property. In 2001 IM Group sold a share portfolio to Christian Vision for £23.6m, which the charity then sold for a £10m profit. Two years later IM Properties sold two properties to the charity for £81m. One of these was then repurchased by another IM company, generating an £8m profit. In 2006 IM Group gifted a property to the company with a value of more than £10m.

Christian Vision has been a successful property investor, selling shopping centres in Exeter and Fareham during 2005-6 for more than £150m.

Which of the donated asset deals is under the Revenue microscope is unclear. The query was first revealed in the 2006 accounts for the charity, filed last year. The 2007 accounts, filed in September, indicate that the dispute is ongoing. The company repeats that the trustees are of the opinion that any corporation tax liability is "unlikely". However, whereas last year the trustees said the amount of potential tax owing was "unquantifiable", this year they say, "the amount involved could be significant". No doubt Christian Vision's troubles with the taxman will once again be amicably resolved.

UNNOTICED amid the wreckage of Icelandic-funded holiday operator XL Leisure Group was a familiar name from the past: Michael Stoney.

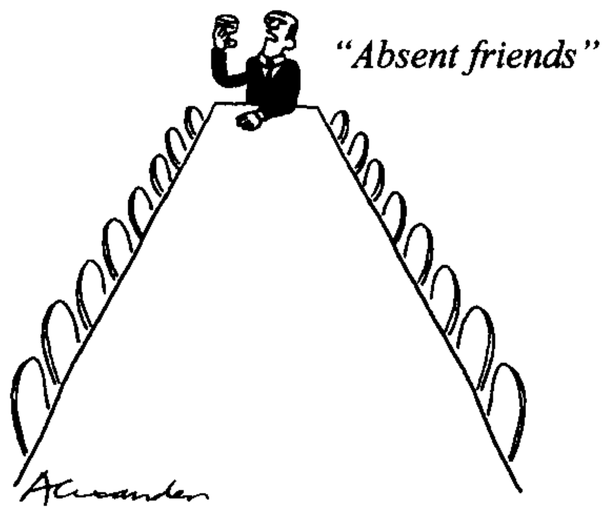
Stoney was expelled as a chartered accountant in 1998 for his role in obtaining a £50m loan from Bankers Trust for one of Robert Maxwell's private companies via Mirror Group Newspapers. Stoney had been one of Cap'n Bob's trusted money men. His fraud trial was stopped and he was acquitted in 1997, following the 1996 not guilty verdicts against Kevin and Ian Maxwell. Stoney continued to serve as a company director. He even described himself as an "accountant".

He re-emerged as chief operating officer of

☛ *See over...*

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG



XL's tour-operating division and was a main board director for six months last year until August, when he resigned as a director of all the group companies – a year ahead of the crash.

PLANET FOOTBALL

Arsenal

SHAREHOLDERS at Arsenal FC's recent annual meeting learned some interesting facts about the mystery surrounding the very sudden departure in May of still unreplaced managing director Keith Edelman.

The accounts disclosed that Edelman has been paid £1.7m as "compensation for loss of office and for consultancy services". So he clearly was asked to leave rather than volunteering to step down and become a consultant. His previous annual take had been £1.1m.

Shareholders were told that Arsenal and Edelman had signed a confidentiality agreement regarding Arsenal affairs – so that neither side would say any "nasty things". Which also suggests that the exit was far from friendly. Shareholders were assured, however, that Edelman's exit was nothing to do with any report by the audit committee headed by director Sir "Chips" Keswick – so squashing clearly unfounded rumours about concern over expenses or inappropriate expenditure.

Chairman Peter Hill-Wood would say no more. But the questions remain – if all was well and routine, why the sudden departure, why the pay-off and why the confidentiality agreement?

Heart of Midlothian

GROWING fears over the economies and banks of the three Baltic countries have started ill-informed tongues wagging about possible problems for the Scottish Premier League club Hearts' colourful owner, Lithuanian banker Vladimir "Vlad the Impaler" Romanov.

Lithuania's credit rating is slipping and its outlook is seen as negative. It was downgraded last week by Moody's. The country is said to be heading for recession and following in the path of neighbours Latvia and Estonia, which ran into difficulties even before September's global credit crisis. One of Latvia's main banks had to be nationalised last week, while Romanov's Ukio bank saw its rating downgraded by Standard & Poor's to negative in September. Last month Moody's announced it was reviewing its rating for a further downgrade.

Hearts is owned by a separate Romanov company, but in September there was embarrassment when players' wages were paid late. This was blamed on an internal technicality. No doubt Romanov and his bank and football club are unaffected and will rise above the problems overshadowing Lithuania and the Baltic economies.

'Slicker'

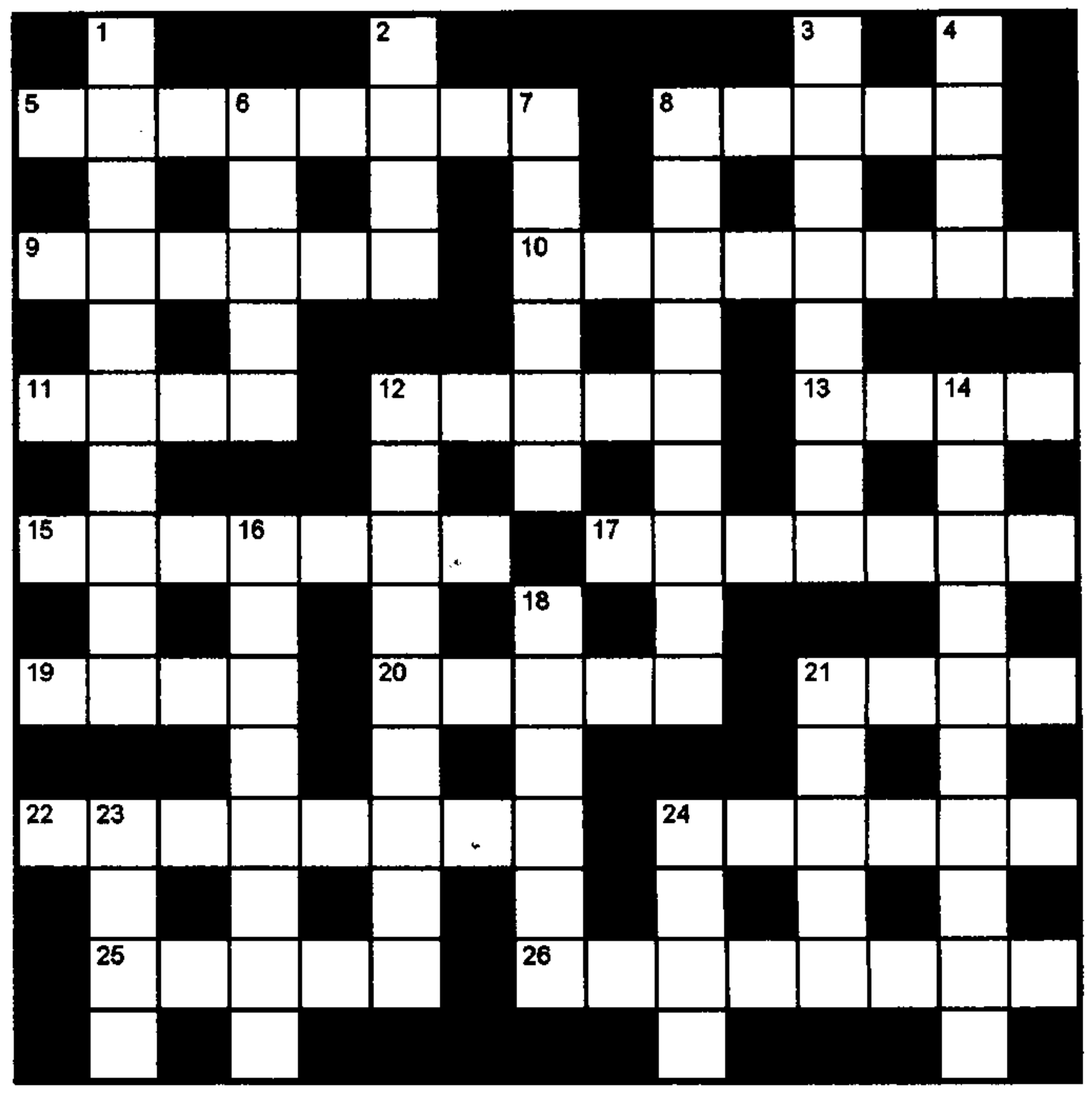
NUMBER CRUNCHING

-25% Drop in price of oil in third quarter of 2008

+71% Rise in Shell's profits for third quarter of 2008

EYE CROSSWORD 378

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 21 November 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

5/21 Swift, perhaps, to associate with rubbish, no depth, an unwelcome caller (8,4)
8 See 15ac.
9 Went to a cafe and performed a sex act? (3,3)
10 City pissed off with last of lucre, sport! (8)
11 Either way, not a body 5/21 will be performing on for a while (4)
12 Fickle fashion so abandoned Kureishi? (5)
13 Right providing the ultimate in socialist schism (4)
15/8 Take stock on the radio and mark? This broadcaster didn't (7,5)
17 Jerks off PRO inside steamy location? (7)
19 A foreigner to Prince Philip lacks tail feature (4)
20 Cameron's opening on entering went badly with audience – cut up (5)
21 See 5ac.
22 At heart, Blair gets due – near distraught as a leader no more (8)
24 Lisa, broadcasting on Five has a gob (6)
25 Pressure managed to get to Barack finally – just a joke? (5)
26 Principle of gettin' castrated if articulated? (8)

DOWN

1 Many think 5/21 should have, giving up the ghost, maybe (3,3,4)
2/18 Arses were concerned in having kittens (4,6)
3 Brown turned up after work as one dreading the next election? (6,2)
4 Sod off, grabbing dog's front bits (4)
6 Obama's mixed blood group changed – responsible for fall-out (1-4)
7 Screwed only with the ends of nacreous hose (6)
8 15/8 and 5/21's 25 did – Obama doesn't have a right to get excited (9)
12 Not quite pissed when there's an equal amount left in the glass (4,5)
14 Mug putting money in the bank – prime concern of politician who's ballsed up? (4-6)
16 A N Wilson's screwed up as a person, relatively speaking (3-2-3)
18 See 2dn.
21 Twelve-inch woody, perhaps, for Brenda? (5)
23 Have a bash at exercise, weed! (4)
24 Straw makes it easier to separate Brenda from fool (4)

Crossword 377 winner: DAVID NORRIS

ACROSS: 1 Eye Wear 5 Elector 9 Chancellor 12 Cowboy 13 Gusseted 14/19 The Great Unwashed 16 Deputy 17 Plague 21 Cadillac 23 Wangle 25/11 Sod off 26 Utter tripe 27 Address 28 Escapee.

DOWN: 2 Yahoo 3 Windbag 4 Acetylene 6 Lords 7 Close-up 8 Off-centre 10 Light 15 Half-arsed 16 Downwards 18 Guilder 19 Uncut 20 Sangria 22 Louts 24 Lapse.

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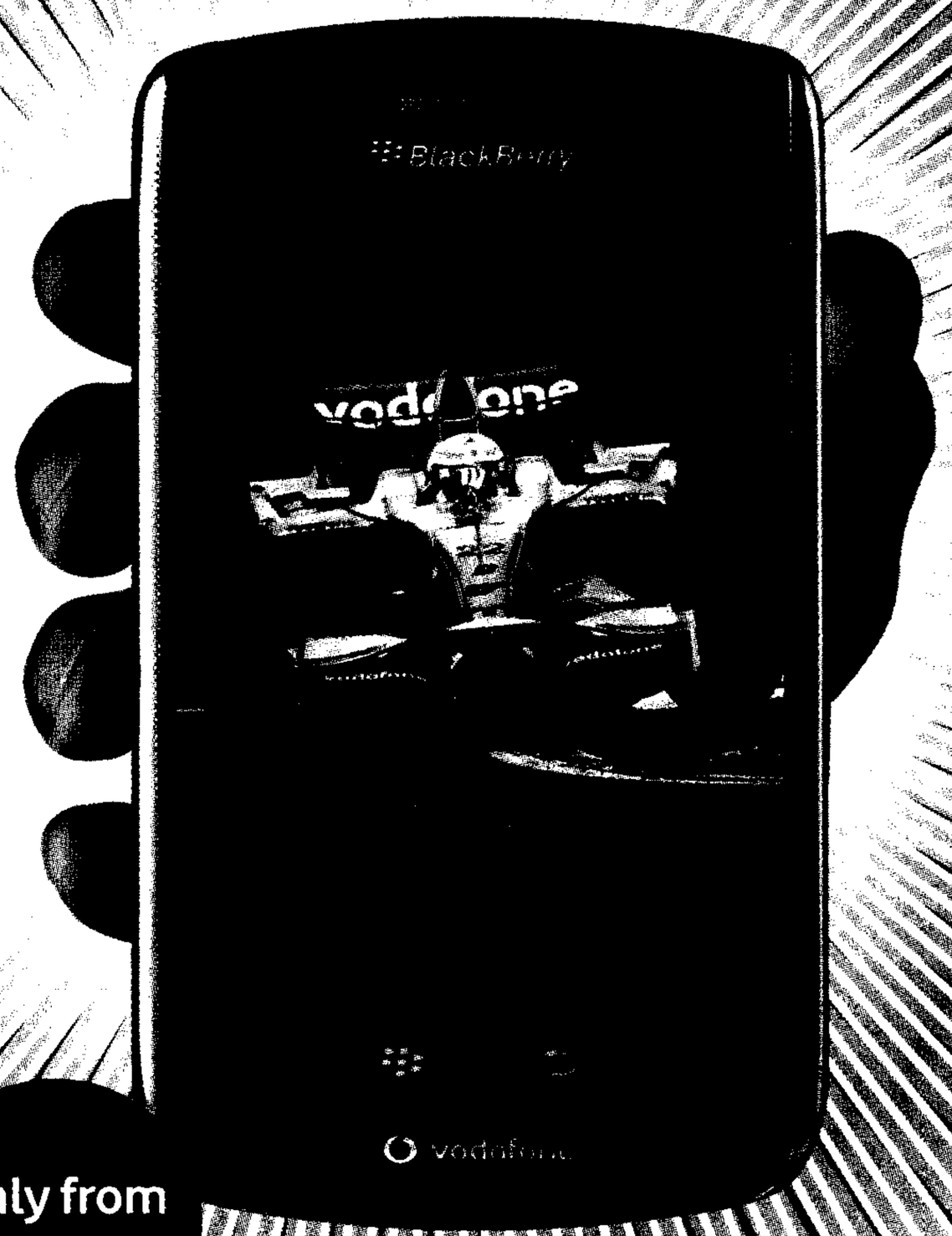

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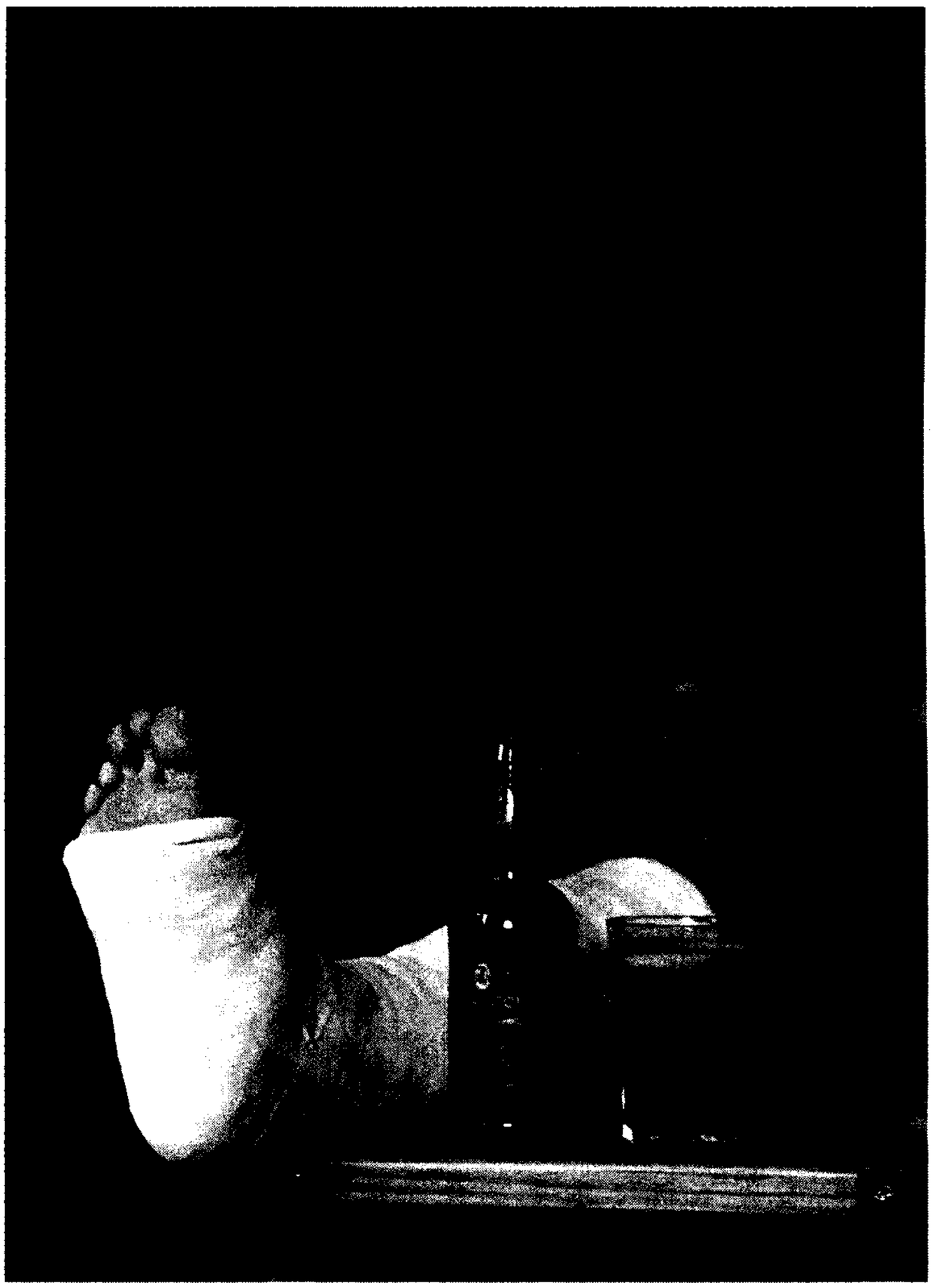
PE/SM

"You've had a lucky break."

I told him. *"Oh, very droll."* was the DOWLY response. Well, I suppose it's hard to keep a sense of humour when your leg's half covered in plaster. *"No, really,"* I said, *"you'll never guess what I found in the off-licence."* I held up a carrier bag, gleefully. He studied it, morosely. *"I dunno, the Holy Grail? The Meaning of Life? Shergar?"* Ignoring his sarcasm I reached into the bag and produced two bottles of Theakston XB. *"You can't get to the beer,"* I exclaimed, *"but now the beer can get to you."* His eyes brightened at the sight of his favourite tipple, his tongue already licking his lips. *"Theakston XB,"* he gasped, *"in new, bottle shaped glasses!"* As we admired the ruby hue of the ale and savoured its fruity flavour I asked what he would be doing during his time of enforced confinement. *"Just following doctor's orders; get lots of rest and take plenty of liquids."* he quipped. The medicine was already working. Recovery was imminent.



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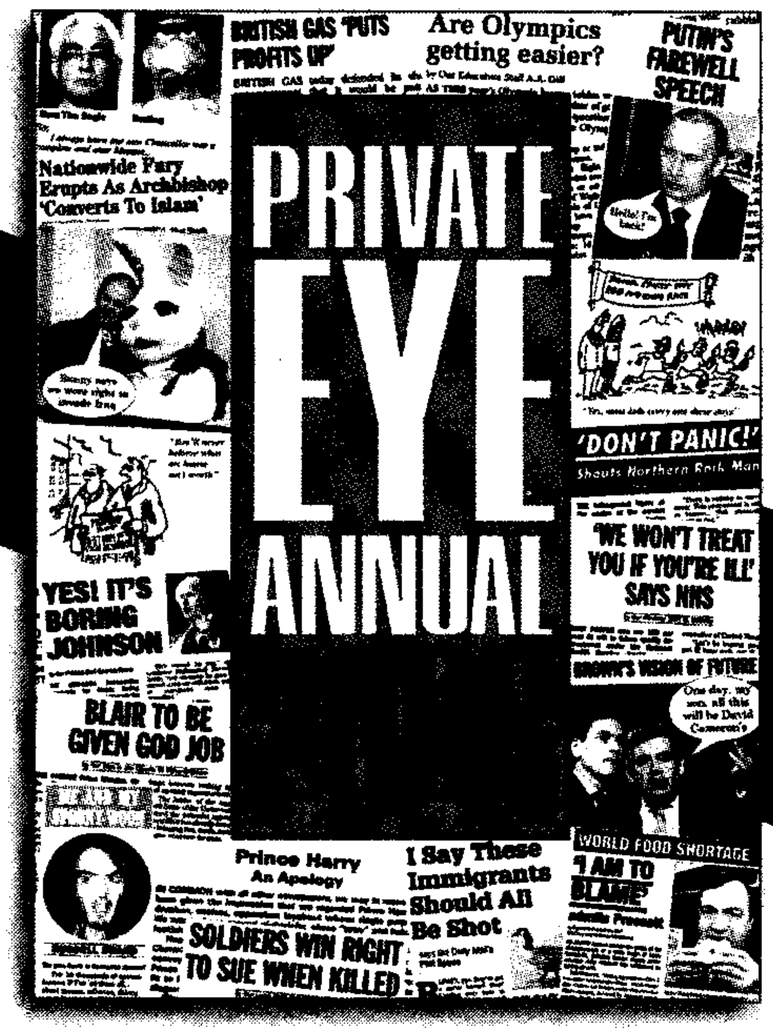
Christmas Books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BRITISH GAS 'PUTS PROFITS UP'
Are Olympics getting easier?
PUTIN'S FAREWELL SPEECH
Nationwide Fury Erupts As Archbishop 'Converts To Islam'
'DON'T PANIC!'
'WE WON'T TREAT YOU IF YOU'RE ILL' SAYS NHS
YES! IT'S BORING JOHNSON
BLAIR TO BE GIVEN GOD JOB
Prince Harry An Apology
I Say These Immigrants Should All Be Shot
SOLDIERS WIN RIGHT TO SUE WHEN KILLED
WORLD FOOD SHORTAGE
I AM TO BLAME

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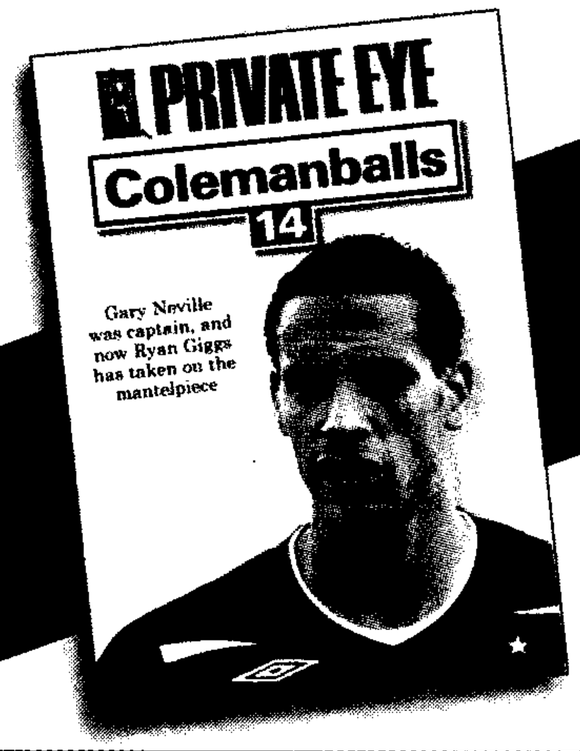

COLEMANBALLS 14

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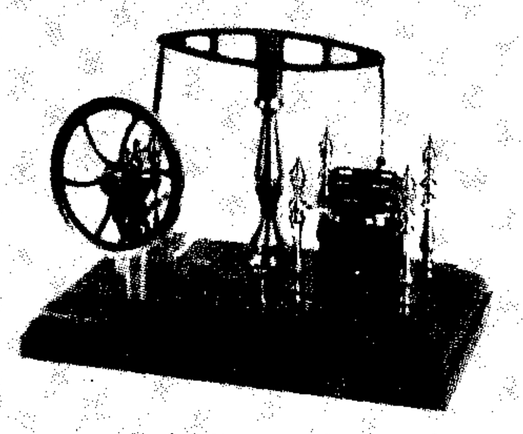

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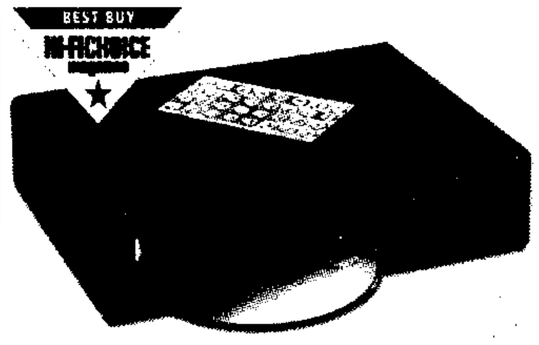

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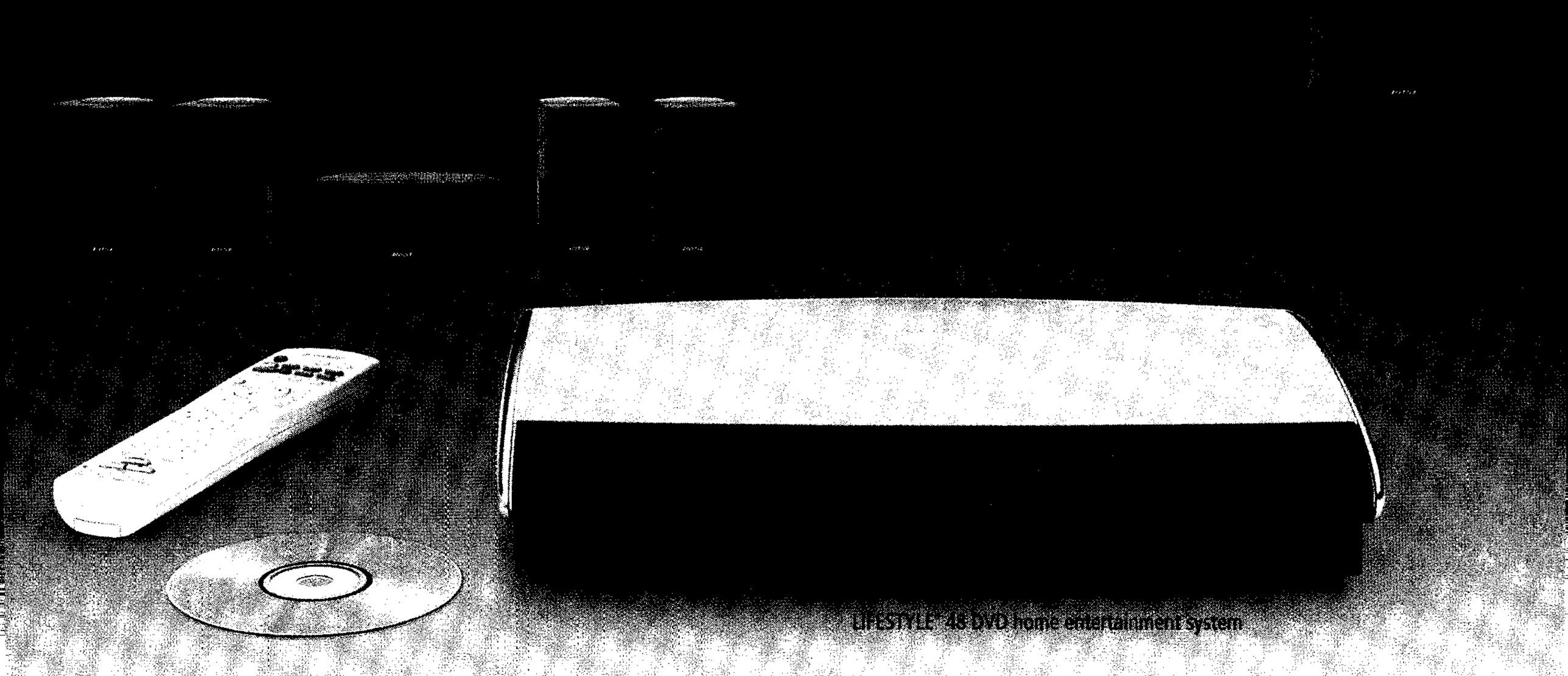

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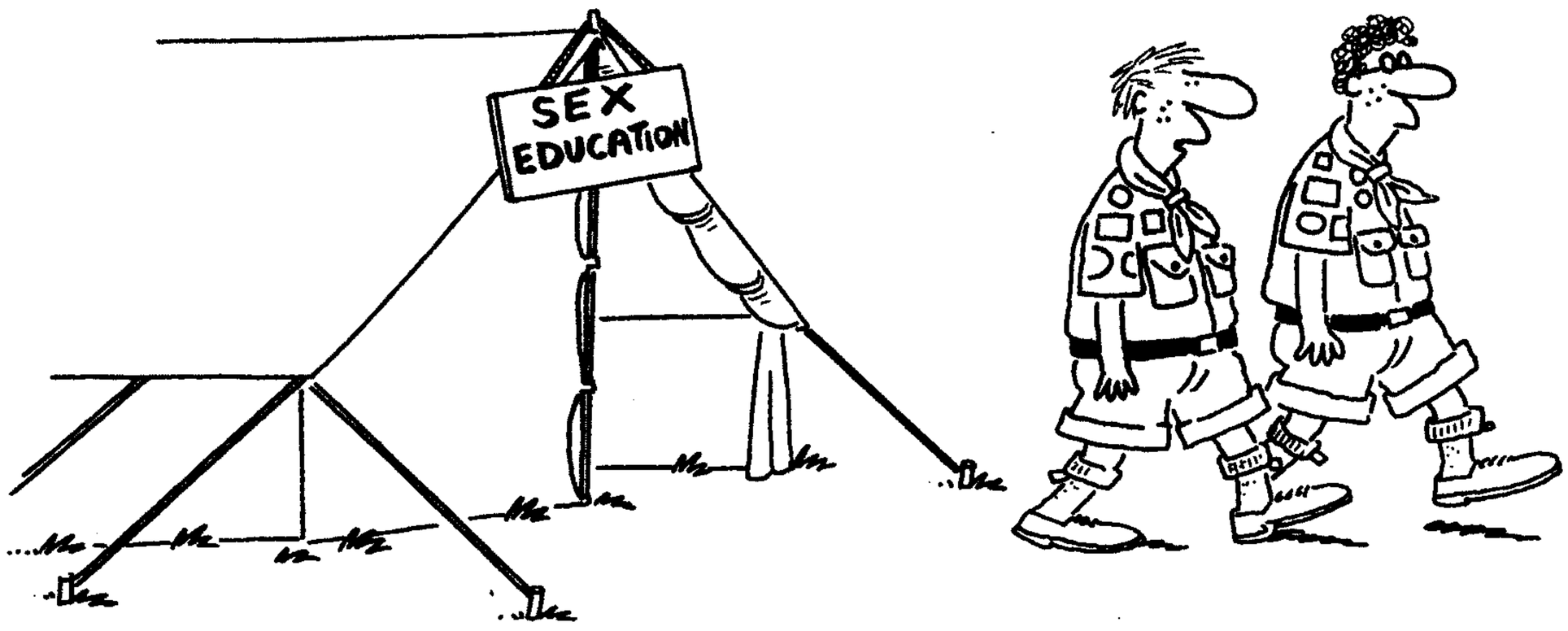

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